

***The
Providence
Of God***

The 1989

POWER



Lectures

Hosted by the Southaven church of Christ,
Southaven, Mississippi

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Editors

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Foreword

Knowing the theme, individual topics, and the writers of the book, many highly respected Bible scholars from across the brotherhood have predicted that the book that you hold in your hand would be one of the most valuable books in regard to the Bible study of the Providence of God which has been published in many years. We deeply and humbly appreciate their evaluation.

It is our studied judgment that a detailed study of the Providence of God is one of the most valuable things in which any individual or society can engage. This study is valuable both for time and eternity!

This is the first book that we have Co-edited since we began to work under the oversight of the elders of the Southaven Church of Christ, but it is not our first work together since this is the fourteenth book that we have Co-edited. Likewise, each year, for the past fourteen years we have served as Co-directors of an annual lectureship.

We are pleased to continue our work together in Co-directing the **POWER** lectureships, Co-editing the book of the **POWER** lectures, and in the capacity respectively of Editor and Managing Editor of the **POWER** journal. We are grateful to our heavenly Father and to a great and wonderful brotherhood!

Thomas B. Warren
Garland Elkins

Dedication

To the elders of the Southaven Church of Christ, Southaven, Mississippi, whose love for Christ and His Word, and the love they have for the souls of mankind, this publication has been made possible. It is with great appreciation that we affectionately dedicate this volume.

Garland Elkins
Thomas Warren

Elders

Homer Eaton

Don Ward

James Williams

Raleigh Wood

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Chapter 1

Introduction To The Study Of The Providence Of God

Garland Elkins

The word “*providence*” is used only once in the Scriptures (Acts 24:2), and here it refers, not to God, but to the fore-thought and work of man. The same word is used in Romans 13:14 where it is translated “*provision*”. It is almost always now used in reference to God. The providence of God is either explicitly stated or necessarily implied by every Bible writer. The providence of God and the Messianic expectations pervade the entire Old Testament. The New Testament begins with the birth of Christ and that “*the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*” These are of course according to the providential plan of God for the redeeming of the world. This plan or scheme of redemption is so comprehensive that it magnifies the great providence of God in the New Testament, giving it a new, enlarged, and richer meaning. Divine providence involves the welfare of the most humble person to the world-wide needs of all of God’s creation. The scope of God’s providence is world-wide and age lasting (Mark 16:15-16).

The providence of God concerns itself with the preservation, care, and government which God exercises over everything that He has created, in order that they may accomplish the purpose for which they were created. However, it must be very emphatically stated that providence does not eliminate the freedom of the human will. Men are free moral agents, and their decisions are their own, and they are morally responsible for them (Deut. 30:15-20). God through the Bible presents

His claims for obedience and righteousness, and through His word vital, important, and weighty matters are discussed. These are set out in such a way that we should be motivated to obey Him (I John 4:19; Rom. 2:4; I John 5:3). The New Bible Dictionary makes the following statement:

“Providence” - No single word in biblical Hebrew or Greek expresses the idea of God’s providence. Pronoia is used for God’s purposive foresight by Plato, Stoic writers, Philo, who wrote a book on **providence** (peri pronoias), Josephus, and the authors of Wisdom (cf. xiv. 3, xvii. 2) and 3, 4 Mac.; but in the New Testament **pronoia** occurs only twice (Acts xxiv. 2; Rom. xiii. 14) both times denoting, not God’s care and forethought, but man’s. The cognate verb **pronoo**, too, is used only of man (Rom. xii. 17; II Cor. viii. 21; I Tim. v. 8).

Providence is normally defined in Christian theology as the unceasing activity of the Creator whereby, in overflowing bounty and goodwill (Psm. cxiv. 9 cf. Matt. v. 45-48), He upholds His creatures in ordered existence (Acts xvii. 28; Col. i. 17; Heb. i.3), guides and governs all events, circumstances, and free acts of angels and men (cf. Psm. cvii; JB. i.12; ii. 6; Gn. xiv. 5-8), and directs everything to its appointed goal, for His own glory (cf. Eph. i. 9-12). This view of God’s relation to the world must be distinguished from: (a) **pantheism**, which absorbs the world into God; (b) **deism**, which cuts off from Him; (c) **dualism**, which divided control of it between God and another power; (d) **indeterminism**, which holds that it is under no control at all; (e) **determinism**, which posits a control of a kind that destroys man’s moral responsibility; (f) the doctrine of **chance**, which denies the controlling power to be rational; and (g) the doctrine of **fate**, which denies it to be benevolent.

Providence is presented in Scripture as a function of divine sovereignty. God is King over all, doing just what He wills (Psm. ciii. 19; cxxxv. 6; Dn. iv. 35; cf. Eph. i. 11). This conviction robustly held, pervades the whole Bible. (**The New Bible Dictionary**, pgs. 1050-1051).

Man Is Given Freedom Of Choice

Joshua's famous statement "*Choose you this day whom ye will serve*" is just as appropriate as it was when spoken in the long ago. Jesus said,

No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon (Matt. 6:24).

There are many things in life which we are compelled to do, and in which there is no choice at all. We are compelled to breathe, and unless one chooses to die, we are compelled to eat, drink, and sleep – there is very little choice in those matters. Children are compelled to go to school, even though they might not want to; we are compelled to stay to the right side of the road when driving a car, unless we want to suffer disastrous consequences. There are multitudes of things we *must* do, things, which, to do or not to do, never give us a moment's thought.

On the other hand, the most important things in life, the things that determine our character and our destiny, are matters in which we not only have the right of choice, but in which we are compelled to make a choice. We may be compelled to go to school, but we are not compelled to pass our examinations — we must choose whether we will graduate or not graduate. There comes a time in everyone's life when one must choose whether one is going to live a righteous or an unrighteous life. There comes a time when one must choose either for or against Christ,

He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad (Matt. 12:30).

And ye will not come to me, that ye may have life (John 5:40).

Without exception this is by far the most important choice in this life. Jesus said,

He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day (John 12:48).

Freedom of choice was permitted and required of men in the Old Testament. God said through Moses,

See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil; In that I command thee this day to love the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply: and the Lord thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it. I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live (Deut. 30:15, 16, 19).

God The Great Giver

The subject of the gifts of God as recorded in the Bible is an inexhaustible and fascinating one. God loves the world, and gave His only begotten Son (John 3:16). Every good, and every perfect gift is from *“the Father of lights”* (James 1:17). Christ has given Himself (Gal. 1:4; 2:20); His body (Luke 22:19); life (John 5:21); a new commandment (John 13:34); wisdom (Luke 21:15); and understanding (I John 5:20). To those who overcome, the Lord Jesus promises many precious blessings (Rev. 2:5) As Paul says *“He gave gifts unto man”* (Eph. 4:8). We are told that all of God’s gifts are good and perfect (James 1:17); that God gives freely (Rom. 8:32); liberally (James 1:5); richly (I Tim. 6:17); without repentance (Rom. 11:29). One of the finest statements in all the Bible on God’s giving are these words of Paul to Timothy:

Charge them that are rich in this present world, that they may be not highminded, nor have their hope set on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy (I Tim. 6:17).

God Works Through His Providence He Does Not Do This Miraculously

The providence of God, like so many other Bible subjects has often been misunderstood, and perverted. God, as He always has, rules in the affairs of men, but he does this within the confines of natural law and not by miracle. Unfortunately many sincere people labor under a serious misunderstanding of the words “*providence*” and “*miracle*”, as if God is limited to the miraculous in His providential working among men. Nothing could be further from the truth. Even in the days when God did sometimes use miracles to bring about the desired results, miracles were the exceptions and not the rule. Miraculous gifts are no longer available to anyone, all of the claims of the fake healers to the contrary.

When the New Testament was fully delivered and confirmed miraculous gifts ceased (Eph. 4:8-13; I Cor. 13:8-13). They were to exist only until “*the unity of faith*” (meaning until all the truth of the New Testament was delivered), then their purpose had been served (Gal. 1:8, 9, 22, 23; Eph. 4:8-13; Jude 3).

1. We do not believe that God’s children are orphans. The Bible teaches that God answers the prayers of the faithful Christians (I Thess. 5:17; Phil. 4:6; James 5:16).

2. We believe that God heals. However, let it be clearly stated, that though God heals today, and such is divine healing; God does not heal miraculously today. God uses His natural laws, not miracles to heal people.

3. God has a healing team. This team is composed of doctors, nurses, hospitals, technicians, dieticians, blood donors, etc. and the prayers of the saints (Luke 5:31; Luke 18:1; Eph. 6:18).

The Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit operates but

not miraculously on either saint or sinner. The Holy Spirit does operate on both saint and sinner through His *word*, the truth (Eph. 6:17; James 1:21; Acts 20:32).

The modern so-called miracle workers talk loud and long, they make pretentious claims but they are not only short, but totally lacking with their proof. Paul not only came to the Thessalonians in word but he fully supported his claims with miracles of confirmation. He stated,

...how that our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance; even as ye know what manner of men we showed ourselves toward you for your sake (I Thess. 1:5).

It is also highly significant that Paul wrought these miracles at Thessalonica. He did not just talk about miraculous works a thousand miles away. Paul performed miracles right there! How unlike Paul are the so-called miracle workers of our day. They talk much; they do absolutely nothing in the way of real miracles. Sometimes they quibble and evade by saying, *"I cannot work miracles but God works miracles through me."* Such is only a dodge for the discerning person can easily see that God never works miracles through them! Why is it then when such false teachers are met and exposed in public debate they never exhibit their miraculous power? Why does God not work miracles through them? The answer is obvious: such men are imposters.

Whoso boasteth himself of a false gift is like clouds and wind without rain (Prov. 25:14).

Simon, the sorcerer, could have gotten more testimonials than any of them, the Bible says,

But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: To whom they all gave

heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God (Acts 8:9-10).

In spite of all of his claims and his popularity God was not with him and he never wrought a real miracle. Rather he “bewitched” them.

The word “*miracle*” means a thing is done in a supernatural way, contrary to natural law. What God does through natural law is not miraculous. God gives us bread through the use of natural means (Matt. 6:9-15). Such is not miraculous. When God gave the Israelites manna directly from heaven, such was a miracle (Exod. 16).

God has a reason for the fact that he is not now miraculously healing the sick and raising the dead. It is not that God is not able to give men power to raise the dead (Matt. 10:8). The reason God is not now making men out of the dust of the ground, as he did Adam, is not that he **cannot** do it. God does not do everything that he can do. *It is not a question of ability, but the issue is what has he willed to do!*

Real miracles are not being performed today. They ceased by the time the New Testament was fully delivered, written and confirmed (Mark 16:17-20; Heb. 2:3).

There is as much difference between a fake miracle and a genuine miracle as there is between daylight and dark. The healing of the lame man in Acts 3 was a genuine miracle. The enemies of the apostles said,

...for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it (Acts 4:16).

They could say nothing against it (V. 14).

All men glorified God for that which was done (V. 21).

The man was “*lame from his mother’s womb*” (Acts 3:2). The man was healed *instantly and publicly*.

An Example Of God's Providence Through The Power Of Truth In The Human Heart: No Miracle Involved

During a part of the time when David was a fugitive from Saul, he and his men lived in the wilderness of Paran. This was near a wealthy man by the name of Nabal. The Bible says,

And there was a man in Maon, whose possessions were in Carmel; and the man was very great, and he had three thousand sheep, and a thousand goats: and he was shearing his sheep in Carmel (I Sam. 25:2).

His wife's name was Abigail. She is described as *"...a woman of good understanding, and of a beautiful countenance"* (I Sam. 25:3). Nabal was a wicked man. The Bible says of him, *"But the man was churlish and evil in his doings, and he was of the house of Caleb"* (I Sam. 25:3). David and his men had shown unusual kindness to Nabal. They had not injured any of Nabal's great flocks, but they had actually been a wall around them both by day and night, protecting them from wild beasts and robbers.

Sheep-shearing time was a season of generosity and goodwill, and so during that time, David, being conscious of the service that he and his men had rendered to Nabal, sent messengers to Nabal with kindly greetings with the request, *"...Give I pray, whatsoever cometh to thine hand unto thy servants, and to thy son David"* (I Sam. 25:8). To the surprise of the messengers Nabal was insulting, saying, *"Who is David?"*

The young men returned and related to him what had happened. He was stung to the quick, *"And David said unto his men, Gird ye on every man his sword..."* (I Sam. 25:13). So David and his men went forth vowing vengeance, not only upon Nabal, but also to all his family. Fortunately, one of Nabal's shepherds who knew how much they were indebted to David, feared the

consequence of Nabal's ungodly conduct, and so he went to Abigail and told her the entire story.

As already noted Abigail was "*a woman of good understanding*" which makes one wonder why she would marry Nabal, a man who "*was churlish and evil in his doings.*" We, of course, do not know whether he was that evil when they married or became that way later. The facts in the case are that Abigail, a woman of good understanding, made haste and loaded her beasts of burden with an abundance and started on her journey to take to David and his men. She did not tell her husband for she knew that he would refuse to allow her to do this thing which eventually saved his life.

When she and David met she let David know that she thought that Nabal's conduct was unbecoming, and then she congratulated him that God had kept him from shedding innocent blood (for David had planned to kill Nabal, and his entire family) (I Sam. 25:34). She then begged him to accept her gift. Then without giving David time to speak she referred to the future in such a way as to show that she had confidence in the prophecies concerning David. She told him that when he became king his memories of shedding innocent blood would sadden him (I Sam. 25:18-31). She convinced David, and he thanked her, and not only so but the major point that I want to emphasize in this connection is that he said that God "*sent thee this day to meet me.*" Please carefully note what David said,

And David said to Abigail, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me: and blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou, which hast kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and from avenging myself with mine own hand (I Sam. 25:32, 33).

In summary of this story I call attention to a few of the points that have to do with the providence of God.

1. Abigail was "*a woman of good understanding.*"
2. She knew and loved the truth and she allowed it to be the ruling influence in her life.

3. She desired to save her life, and the lives of her family.

4. She both knew and believed the prophecies concerning the promises of God to make him king of Israel.

5. Though there is nothing said that implied that she did not love her husband in spite of his wickedness, yet she did not, and would not, defend him in his wickedness. She correctly described him to David when she said, *"Let not my lord, I pray thee, regard this man of Belial, even Nabal: for as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name, and folly is with him..."* (I Sam. 25:25).

6. She informed David, *"...but I thine handmaiden saw not the young men of thy lord, whom thou didst send"* (I Sam. 25:25).

7. David knew and loved the truth, and so realizing that her attitude was good and proper, and believing that everything that she said was true, and desiring to do right himself he gladly accepted her good advice.

8. Thus David attributed the solution of this problem to the Lord for sending Abigail to him, and for her good advice which caused him to refrain from shedding innocent blood.

9. The conclusion is irresistible that the power of truth in the hearts of Abigail and David and their desire to do right is all that is involved in this incident. Therefore without any miracle God made all things work together for the good of both David and Abigail (Rom. 8:28).

10. That is all that is needed, and that is all that is promised. God's providence does work in our lives even today, but it is non-miraculous.

God Through His Providence Blesses The Righteous And Punishes The Wicked

God has always worked through His providence. During the Patriarchal and Mosaic age, and in the first century, He sometimes performed miracles in bringing to fruition His desired ends. However, even though He

continues to work providentially in the lives of individuals and nations as stated above He *does not now work miracles*, but He works through natural law. Also, it should be observed that even in the time when He did sometimes work miracles in the bringing to pass His goals, yet, for the most part, He worked through natural law. Furthermore, God not only used the righteous to bring to pass His will, either to bless the righteous or to punish the wicked, and then later punished the wicked that He had used to punish other wicked people. This had been especially true as regards His using wicked rulers and their nations to punish rebellious Judah and Israel. At a later time those wicked rulers and nations received their just recompense of reward, they reaped what they sowed (Gal. 6:7-8; Col. 3:25). Let us examine some of the many cases that could be studied of where God providentially punished the wicked and blessed the righteous.

1. Near the beginning of time there lived one of the most righteous of all men, “*Enoch, the seventh from Adam*” (Jude 14). It is said of him,

And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him (Gen. 5:24).

The Hebrew writer said of him,

By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and he was not found, because God translated him; for he hath had witness borne to him that before his translation he had been well-pleasing unto God (Heb. 11:5).

Enoch lived a righteous and holy life in every way. Not only did God oppose the wicked of Enoch’s day, but Enoch also opposed them. Not only did Enoch oppose them in his day but he also prophesied of the final destiny of the wicked,

And to these also Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, Behold, the Lord came with ten thousands of his holy ones, to execute judgment

upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their works of ungodliness which they have wrought, and of all the hard things which ungodly sinners have spoken against him (Jude 14, 15).

God certainly took care of Enoch for he was one of only two men who were spared the ordeal of death (Gen. 5:24; Heb. 11:5). Elijah was the other great man who went to be with God without dying (II Kings 2:1-11).

2. Noah, like Enoch, walked with God. It is written of him,

These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God (Gen. 6:9).

God instructed Noah to,

Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch (Gen. 6:14).

Noah did what God instructed him to do,

Thus did Noah according to all that God commanded him, so did he (Gen. 6:22).

Thus God providentially preserved Noah while at the same time he destroyed the wicked. Peter wrote,

Which sometimes were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ (I Pet. 3:20-21).

And spared not the ancient world, but preserved Noah with seven others, a preacher of righteousness, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly (Gen. 6:22).

This included using the water of the flood to save him just as baptism is a requirement of God that we must obey before we can be saved (I Pet. 3:20-21).

3. God called Abraham, and because he was obedient He blessed him (Gen. 12:1-4). The Hebrew writer wrote,

By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed to go out unto a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing whither he went (Heb. 11:8).

Abram's faith grew, and ultimately he became the father of the faithful. God took care of him, and blessed him, and Christians are of the spiritual seed of Abraham (Rom. 4:1-25; James 2:17-26; Gal. 3:26-27). During the lifetime of Abraham God also punished many wicked people.

4. Joseph was hated by his brethren, and was ultimately sold by them as a slave, and he was taken into Egypt (Gen. 37:1-12; 18-28). Potiphar's wife first sought to tempt him, and since he loved God so much and was too good and pure to commit adultery with her, she lied about him (Gen. 39:4-20). However, God was with him in prison, and through His providence Joseph was able to interpret Pharaoh's dreams; thus causing Pharaoh to make him the second ruler in Egypt (Gen. 41:38-45). In the process of time Joseph's brethren came to Egypt to buy grain, and ultimately Joseph made himself known to his brothers. He at that time saw the providence of God in it all, and even though his wicked brothers had mistreated him, and treated him cruelly, they were now very penitent. Therefore Joseph said,

Now therefore be not grieved, not angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life. For these two years hath the famine been in the land: and yet there are five years, in the which there shall neither be earing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by

a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt” (Gen. 45:5-8).

Joseph sent for his aged father, Jacob, and after their joyous reunion, Joseph settled his father and brethren in Goshen, the best part of Egypt. After the death and burial of Jacob, Joseph’s brethren once again besought Joseph to forgive them. Joseph, with great tenderness assured them of his forgiveness, and again states his complete confidence in God and His providence. It is written,

And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God? But as for you ye thought evil against me: but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them (Gen. 50:19-21).

5. The providence of God in preserving Moses and the Israelites, while at the same time punishing Pharaoh and others is clearly seen. The history of Moses divides itself into three equal periods. His first forty years were spent in Egypt (Acts 7:23); the next forty years were spent in Midian (Acts 7:29-30); the last forty years were spent in the wilderness as the great leader of God’s people. Moses sets out the providence of God in many passages. In Deuteronomy chapters 31-34 are some of the choicest statements of God’s providence in blessing His people, and punishing the wicked. One of the great summary passages is:

The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms... (Deut. 33:27).

God’s providence will be more clearly apprehended when we *“sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb”* (Rev. 15:3), in heaven.

6. God providentially blessed Daniel but overthrew his enemies. The key to much of the success of truth over error was the faithfulness of Daniel to his God (Dan. 1:8). God conveyed His love to Daniel through His messenger when he said,

O Daniel, a man greatly beloved... (Dan. 10:11).

7. The providence of God is demonstrated in the life of Esther. The people of God were saved, and the wicked were defeated. Although Mordecai was not certain as to how the providence of God would work when he said to Esther,

...who knoweth whether thou are come to the kingdom for such a time as this? (Esther. 4:14).

yet in looking back no one can doubt that God through His providence did make things turn out well.

God Sometimes Uses Wicked People To Punish Other Wicked People

Sometimes God uses wicked people to punish His own unfaithful people. Later he punishes the wicked that He has used according to their deeds. God used Nebuchadnezzar to punish Judah. In fact He refers to Nebuchadnezzar as

Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant... (Jer. 25:9).

Later God punished that proud, and wicked monarch (Dan. 4:1-37).

God Sometimes Protected His Faithful Children From The Wicked

During the reign of righteous Hezekiah, Sennacherib, the king of Assyria

...came up against all the defenced cities of Judah, and took them (Isa. 36:1).

Rabshakeh, Sennacherib's general came with a mighty army, and he blasphemed God, and demanded of Hezekiah that he surrender. Hezekiah took it to the Lord, and said,

For I will defend this city to save it for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake (Isa. 37:35).

The result was,

Then the angel of the Lord went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses. So Sennacherib, king of Assyria departed, and went and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh. And it came to pass, as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons smote him with the sword; and they escaped into the land of Armenia: and Esarhaddon his son reigned in his stead (Isa. 37:36-38).

God used Cyrus, the Persian king to deliver the nation of Judah from Babylonian captivity.

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying. Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, All the kingdoms of the earth hath the Lord God of heaven given me; and he hath charged me to build him an house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? The Lord his God be with him and let him go up (II Chron. 36:22-23).

God Knows How

When Lot chose the well-watered plain of Jordan, and pitched his tent toward Sodom he showed lack of

consideration and respect for his uncle Abraham. However, after a period of time when living in wicked Sodom he is represented by the apostle Peter as being a righteous man.

And delivered righteous Lot, sore distressed by the lascivious life of the wicked (II Pet. 2:7).

It is in this context that Peter affirms that,

The Lord knoweth how to deliver the ungodly out of temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment unto the day of judgment (II Pet. 2:9).

The Bible definitely teaches the providence of God, but great caution should be exercised in dogmatically contending that a given act is providential. What may appear at first to be providence may be, and often is seen to be otherwise, in time to come. Generally in order to ascertain providence one must look backward as did Joseph. Even though Paul thought that in the case of his sending Onesimus back to Philemon his master, now as a Christian since Paul had converted him in Rome (Philemon 10), that the whole thing was turning out to be providential, yet he merely stated that "*perhaps*" such was the case. He wrote,

For perhaps he was therefore parted from thee for a season, that thou shouldest have him for ever; no longer as a servant, but more than a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much rather to thee, both in the flesh and in the Lord (Philemon 15-16).

God's General Providence

God blesses both saint and sinner in many ways:

Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy: but I say unto you, Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you; that ye may be sons of your Father who is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil

and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust. For if you love them that love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the Gentiles the same? Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect (Matt. 5:43-48).

God provides food for the animals.

He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry (Psm. 147:9).

The young lions roar after their prey, and seek their meat from God (Psm. 104:21).

God cares for the birds:

Behold the birds of the heaven, that they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; and your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are not ye of much more value than they? (Matt. 6:26).

God's Special Providence

God takes special care of His children. Paul wrote,

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose (Rom. 8:28).

Even when Paul was in prison, God's providence was at work. He said,

Now I would have you know, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the progress of the gospel; so that my bonds became manifest in Christ throughout the whole praetorian guard, and to all the rest; and that most of the brethren in the Lord, being confident through my bonds, are more abundantly bold to speak the word of God without fear (Phil. 1:12-14).

Paul assures the Philippian Christians of God's providence for them in these words,

And my God shall supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:19).

Not only to the Ephesian Christians, but also to all Christians of all generations the following words serve as a great encouragement.

Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us (Eph. 3:20).

God Knows Our Needs And Provides (Matt. 6:25-34)

The emphasis in verse 25 should be on the word "*therefore*," which is a word following a series of statements which cannot be contradicted and which introduce an inevitable conclusion. The remainder of the sixth chapter of the Sermon on the Mount is an expansion of the thought already introduced in verses 19-24 that we are to live for God and not for the world. We are to trust heavenly riches and not mammon.

We must not attach ourselves as servants to the material things of this earth. There is something in life higher and more to be desired than mere food and drink and clothing. There is a Father in heaven who cares for the birds and the grass, which He brought into existence. God, who has given life, which is more than food, will take care to provide food for maintenance of life. God, who provides food for the birds, will certainly provide food for His own children. Anxious care about the success of means cannot produce any good.

God clothes the grass and flowers of the field with more than all the glory which Solomon's garments had. In the creatures God has made us see the living evidence of the non-necessity for anxiety on our part. The "*birds of the heaven*" (v. 26) are not anxious, the "*lilies of the field*" (v. 28) cannot be, yet, their wants are supplied. It is, therefore, unreasonable, since we are of "*much more value than they*," that we be anxious. Again, I emphasize

that Jesus warns us against anxiety but not against foresight and prudence. Foresight is not the cause of anxiety but is usually a preventive. Anxious thought is contrary to all the lessons of nature which show it to be unnecessary. "*Be not anxious*" is expressed in slightly differing forms (vs. 25, 28, 31, 34) four times in this context.

The heathen world, knowing nothing of the loving heavenly Father, seeks eagerly the externals of life, but Christians, knowing that their Father is in heaven, should not admit heathen worries (or any other worries) into their lives. "*Be not anxious*" is a command of Christ, and it is as binding as any He ever uttered. When we worry, we are breaking one of His solemn commands. Our Lord would call us back to a consciousness that life is an infinitely larger thing than the externals. To be anxious reflects on God's power, love, and goodness.

Our main aim in life must be to promote the Cause of the Lord. The necessary things will then be added. A confident and assured dependence upon the care of our heavenly Father will banish anxiety.

It is a great blessing that we do not know the future, for, if we did, we would often be miserable. It is folly to borrow trouble and cross bridges before we get to them. A large part of our unhappiness arises from the dread of that which never comes. A French saying states (and, there is often a great element of truth in it), "**The worst misfortunes are those that never arrive.**" The cure for anxiety is simple trust in the faithfulness, love, goodness, and providence of our heavenly Father. On the other hand, anxiety is most injurious in that when our present thoughts are thus taken up with the possible evils of tomorrow, we are making them possibilities by so doing the certain evils of today. The concluding verse (34) shows that it is foolish to anticipate tomorrow's trouble today and to try to bear it today. If it does come, it must be borne just the same on the morrow—and much that we anticipate today may never come even on the

morrow. The morrow shall bring with it troublesome difficulties of its own; the present day has problems sufficient for our attention.

Worry Is Unnecessary And Futile

To avoid worry, it is necessary first of all to be a Christian. We must be convinced that God will, indeed, take care of us. We can be assured of His wisdom to take care of us. He is the *“only wise God”* (Rom. 16:27). Likewise, we are assured of His ability to take care of us.

Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us (Eph. 3:20).

The most encouraging (for us) attribute of God is His goodness toward His children.

Our soul waiteth for the Lord: he is our help and our shield (Psm. 33:20).

God is wise, powerful, and good (Psm. 139:12). We rejoice in the following encouragement:

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose (Rom. 8:28).

What To Do With Anxieties

Harassing cares and anxieties are represented as burdens. There are three kinds of burdens, **First**, there are burdens we alone must bear. *“Each man shall bear his own burden”* (Gal. 6:5). **Second**, there are burdens with which others may assist us. *“Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ”* (Gal. 6:2). **Third**, there are also burdens which we cannot bear, nor can others bear them with us. To handle these we must: *“Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved”* (Psm. 55:22). These burdens are too heavy for us and

our fellows. What we are to cast upon God are those cares and anxieties which lie beyond the range of human agency and ability. Peter instructs us,

Casting all your anxiety upon him, because he careth for you (I Peter 5:7).

We Can Depend Upon God's Providence

Jesus tells, "*Be not anxious for your life.*" He then begins a series of arguments which are designed to cause us to trust in the providence of God. His first argument is that the life is more valuable than food and the body than raiment. Since God has given us the greater gift, He argues, He will give us the lesser gifts necessary to the sustaining that greater gift.

A second reason Jesus gives for our trusting the providence of God is that the birds of the heaven neither sow nor reap nor gather food into barns, and, yet, they are cared for by God. God has not made it the duty of the birds to gather their food in the summer to last them through the winter, but He has made it our duty to provide for ourselves (II Thess. 3:10) under His providence (II Cor. 9:8).

His third argument for His providential care for us is that a man cannot add "*one cubit unto his stature*" (KJV) or "*one cubit unto the measure of his life*" (ASV). The point is we are not to be anxious about that over which we have no control and for which we are not responsible. Jesus points out that: "*For after all these things do the Gentiles seek.*" It is perhaps to be expected that those who are not believers in God would have as their chief interest these things, but Jesus tells His disciples that they have a heavenly Father who will provide these things for them, and they are to trust Him for them. If the disciples of Christ do not trust their heavenly Father to provide for them, they are no better than the heathen.

Jesus then deals with practical problems; what people eat and wear cause perhaps as much and often more anxiety than anything else in life. He points out that

the lilies of the field grow but they neither toil nor spin. They do not provide their own clothing, yet, He says that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. He then shows that we are of far greater worth. In three concise, terse, and pointed questions Jesus covers the field of anxieties of a vast majority of people. *“What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or Where-withal shall we be clothed?”*

Jesus gives a final reason to trust God’s providence. He said,

For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

Our heavenly Father knows that we need all these things, and, loving us as He does, He will provide our necessities. Jesus said,

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you (Matt. 7:7).

If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give good things to them that ask him (Matt. 7:11).

It Is Imperative That Our Priorities Be Right

Jesus said,

But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you (Matt. 6:33).

Thus, our Lord teaches that happiness and security are within the reach of His children (and, all could obtain it, if they became Christians and would put the Lord and His kingdom first). If a person seeks only the material things, he cannot expect the spiritual, but, if he seeks the spiritual, *“All these things shall be added unto you.”*

We are to live our lives a day at a time. Jesus said,

Be not therefore anxious for the morrow: for the morrow will be anxious for itself (Matt. 6:34).

We are not to borrow troubles from either yesterday or tomorrow. Each day has enough duties and responsibilities to engage all our wisdom, strength, integrity and efforts.

Let us remember that God knows our every need and that He is able to fulfill our needs.

And my God shall supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:19).

He loves us and will gladly provide for us.

And God is able to make all grace abound unto you; that ye, having always all sufficiency in everything, may abound unto every good work (II Cor. 9:8).

Therefore, let us

Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths (Prov. 3:5-6).

Chapter 2

The Providence Of God And The Cross Of Christ

Thomas B. Warren

PART I: SOME INTRODUCTORY MATTERS

The message of this chapter will depend, in some large measure, on the definitions which are given in Chapter 1 of this book. However, other words will also be defined in this and succeeding chapters.

Limitations Of This Chapter

Some matters with which this chapter will not deal. This chapter will not deal with (1) the proof that God does exist, (2) the proof that the Bible is the inspired word of God, (3) the proof that miracles have ceased.

Assumptions Of This Study

This present chapter will assume: (1) that God does exist (although the existence of God *can* be proved, such effort is beyond the scope of this book), (2) that God is infinite in all of His attributes (of course, this matter will be dealt with throughout this book, but no formal proof of it will be presented), (3) that the Bible is the inspired word of God, (4) that what the Bible teaches to be true is actually true, (5) that it is possible for men to learn (come to knowledge of) what the Bible really does teach (John 8:32).

(1) God. God is the infinite, self-existent, eternal Being who created all that exists other than Himself, who

is infinite in all of His attributes, and who, because of His infinite love, grace, power, et al., has provided men with all that they really need.

(2) The Bible. The Bible is the inspired, infallible, all-sufficient (in showing man what to do with himself) word of God.

(3) Providence. Quite simply, the “*providence*” of God is a word used to refer to what God does in foreseeing and making available to man those things which he really does *need* (not merely *wants*). The providence of God necessarily entails God’s infinite knowledge, infinite wisdom, infinite goodness, infinite power, infinite presence, and so on (other matters will be discussed in detail in the rest of the book). Thus, providence involves foresight and knowledge of true goals, love, direction, power, care, and so on.

(4) What Providence Is Not.

a. *It is not miraculous.* This means that it is not, for men living today, brought about by the exercise of miraculous power. This is the case in spite of the fact that, during the Old Testament period (as well as the early part of the New Testament period [during the days of the Apostles]), miracles were often used in the providential activities of God in behalf of various people. The Bible plainly teaches that miracles ceased about nineteen hundred years ago.

b. *It is not something which “just happens.”* It is not merely an accident or a mere happenstance. God *is* involved in it — and designedly so. This book has, as its main goal, the explanation of this fact (according to the teaching of the Bible). In connection with all of this — in spite of there being no miraculous elements involved, God plans, wills, listens to and answers prayer, makes judgments, protects (by non-miraculous activities), helps in healing, loves, encourages, and on and on. At times, men can “*pretty well pin-point*” matters which are involved in the providence of God. At other times, it is a very difficult — if indeed not an impossible thing — to do.

It is true, however, that, at times at least, one can truthfully say, “*This is the sort of thing that could be the providence of God.*”

c. Thus, it can truthfully be said that God is in command of the universe (taking into account the free-will of human beings). This has been the case in the past, it is the case in the present, and it will be the case in the future (see Rom. 11:36). Note carefully the expressions, “*from him,*” “*through him,*” and “*to him.*” And, then the conclusion, “*to whom be glory forever.*”

d. So, can it not be truthfully said that the providence of God involves the exercise and the continuance of His power, goodness, and wisdom by which He has created and by which He maintains (preserves) all things and brings about the fulfillment of His eternal purposes (Gen. 1:1; John 1:1-2; Matt. 28:18-20; Col. 1:18; et al.). Thus, even though the era of miracles has passed, God still works in the affairs of men in order to bring about the results which He desires (in compatibility with the free will of men [II Pet. 3:9; Matt. 7:13-14]).

PART II

SOME MORE SPECIFICS REGARDING GOD'S PROVIDENCE

1. **The world.** God planned the world. He created it to be inhabited (Isa. 45:18; Gen. 1:1ff; 2:1ff). God, through the Word, created everything which exists (including the world and man) other than Himself (John 1:1-3; 1:4-14; 17:5; Psm. 33:6; Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2; 4:11; John 8:12; 12:46; 3:16-18; Heb. 4:12; Rom. 1:15-17; Col. 1:16-23).

2. God provided man with a physical body, a soul, a spirit, intelligence (mind), free will (the ability to decide whether he will choose to do good or to do evil; cf. Matt. 11:28-30; 7:13-29).

3. God provided *man* with the **perfect companion** — not another man, but a **woman** (who was a helper [companion] perfectly fit for him). She provided *feminin-*

ity as a counterpart to his *masculinity*, *beauty* to balance his *handsomeness*, the *body* with which to express *sexual love*, the *body* to provide the means of *having children* (thus providing the means of having a *family*), and so on down through the history of man.

Providence And Human Free Will

Of course, all of this involved the necessity of exercising free will. Men and women, having free will, have always had the ability to exercise the free will with which God provided them. Along with this ability from God there has always been responsibility *to* God. But the man and the woman misused their free will (to either obey or to disobey God) and, as a result, they were cast out of the Garden. But, even so, God had provided them a world in which to live outside of the Garden. Their downfall (in losing access to the Tree of Life) came from having *heard* a lie, having *believed* a lie, and having *obeyed* a lie. (In order for any man or woman living today to gain access to the Tree of Life (in Heaven) he/she must hear the truth, believe the truth, and obey the truth; cf. Rom. 10:13-14; Heb. 5:8-9; et. al.).

More On Free Will

God gave instructions to Adam and Eve. He meant for them to *obey* those instructions (just as He means for people living today to obey His instructions [set out in the Bible]). When Adam and Eve disobeyed, God did not just casually overlook their disobedience. He had given them instructions which were very simple (thus, easily understood and obeyed). Yet, they did not properly exercise the free will with which God had endowed them; they ate of the fruit of which He had forbidden them to eat. When this occurred, God cast them out of the Garden into the world which He, knowing they would sin, had provided them. He also gave them insight into the Savior which He would provide for men (Gen. 3:1-19; cf. John 3:15-18; Gal. 3:26-27; Heb. 5:8-9; John 1:11-

14; et al.).

God's Grace

God provided grace. Grace is unmerited favor. Because of the weakness of the flesh man sinned (Rom. 8:1-5). But God provided a means by which he could be forgiven of his sins: the grace of God (Rom. 5:8-9; 8:1-5; Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 11:6; Mark. 16:15-16; Luke 24:45-49). (More will be said in regard to this matter in paragraphs below.

There Is Also The Very Crucial Matter Of Justice

Paul, guided by the Holy Spirit, declared that the *wages* of sin is death (eternal separation from God, Rom. 6:23; II Thess. 1:7-9). This is in sharp contrast to the grace of God which provides eternal life (which no one can earn; Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 6:23; 11:6; Titus 2:11). The Bible plainly teaches that all men and women who die without having been saved by the grace of God will be recipients of the *wrath* of God (eternal punishment), which they will have *earned* by their sins (Rom. 6:23).

God has provided a world (outside of the Garden of Eden) which involves the situation in which human beings (as well as animals) face the possibility of suffering and also of death. But even in such situations it has been said that

You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good (Gen. 50:19-20).

Further, Job said,

Though he slay me, yet will I trust him (Job 13:15).

These words manifest faith in God (cf. Rom. 4:20-21).

It is in this world that each man must make the decision as to what he will do with his life. No one can make his decision before he is born into this world.

Neither can any one make his decision (in relation to God's eternal purpose) after he has died (Heb. 9:27).

Of course, animals do not face God in the judgment, but every responsible human being will face that judgment (Heb. 9:27; Matt. 25:46).

PART III

THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD AND THE CROSS OF CHRIST

By no amount of good works — no matter how great — could any human being earn (or obtain) the forgiveness of even one sin which he has committed. If man could have been saved by meritorious works, there would have been no need for the grace of God (the unmerited favor of God). God's gift of His Son on the cross of Calvary is the crowning act of God's providence in regard to His eternal purpose. It could well be said that what the cross teaches is the very heart of the Bible. It perfectly ties together the eternal purpose of God (in His love, to save every person who truly loves Him in return, (John 14:15, 21).

So, let us look, for a few moments, at what the cross of Christ tells us about His providence. There are many things that all men need to know. It is surely the case that the things that men need most to know are taught by the cross of Christ. By "*the cross*" (as used below) I will be referring to the fact that God gave His only begotten Son to die on the cross so that sinners might be saved by the grace of God and not lost according to what they deserve. The cross is deeply involved in the providence of God because of (1) what it *does* for men and (2) what it *teaches* those who will properly discern the evidence. Just what does the cross teach that is so important to us human beings? How is it that the cross is God's supreme declaration to men?

1. The cross is God's supreme declaration of

His own existence. There are many proofs of God's existence. Among these are (1) man himself (his mind, his body, et al. Psm. 139:14), (2) the heavens (Psm. 19:1-5). But Jesus said,

...he that hath seen me hath seen the Father (John 14:9).

The Father gave the Son so that men might receive eternal life (John 3:16; Rom. 8:7-8). There is no greater — there can be no greater — manifestation of the providence of God than the gift of His Son for the sins of the world (Heb. 2:9). What could not have been provided in any other way was provided when God gave His Son on the cross. The cross declares,

God gave His Son to provide salvation for sinners who will repent and obey Him (Heb. 5:8-9; Rom. 5:8-9).

2. Every human being of accountable age needs to be provided with the message, *"You have sinned!"* By giving His son to die on the cross, God cried out to every person, *"You have sinned!"* What wonderful providence.

3. By giving His Son to die on the cross, God provided all men with the message, *"God is righteous — infinitely just; He CANNOT tolerate sin."* He thereby declares that,

Something must be done about your sin. You will be lost forever if you are not forgiven of your sins (Rom. 8:1-5; 3:24-27).

4. By giving His Son to die on the cross, God provided man with an essential message,

No sinner can be saved apart from the grace of God — through the blood of Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:8-9; Heb. 9:22; Rom. 8:1-5; 5:8-9; 11:6).

While works are necessary to salvation (James 2:24-26), no one can be saved by meritorious works (Luke 17:10).

5. The providence of God is further manifested (in connection with God's eternal purpose) by the declaration (by the death of Jesus Christ on the cross) that,

...while you cannot save yourself without the grace of God, God can save you by His grace through the power of the Gospel of Christ (Rom. 1:15-17; Heb. 7:25; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:45-47; et al.).

The providence of God is manifested in His power to save sinners through the Gospel. This, in effect, argues that if God gave us the greatest gift, we are not to worry about other matters (cf. Phil. 4:4-7).

6. The providence of God (as to His eternal purpose) is further manifested (by the cross), not only by His having the power to save sinners, but also by His willingness (through His love) to save men. He *has* the power, He *wants* to use that power, and He *will* use that power to save those who will love and obey Him (Heb. 5:8-9; John 14:15-21; Mark 16:15-16; cf. Titus 2:11).

7. The providence of God (in connection with His eternal purpose) exalts the truth. The cross declares that the truth is objective (it is not changed by any man's drawing an opinion as to what it is — human decisions in regard to the truth do not change the truth at all (Acts 23:1). Further, the cross declares that the truth is necessary. In his gracious providence, God has provided with the one — the *only* — message which can save him from his sins (Gal. 1:6-9). Any man who rejects the gospel will be damned (Mark 16:15-16; II Thess. 1:7-9). By His gracious providence, God has given man the one and only inspired message — the Bible (II Tim. 3:16-17). The truth is unique; there is no other message which can even compare with it. Just being religious, just believing some religious message will not save one. It is the Gospel of Christ — and only that Gospel — which can save any person. And, may it be emphasized, that truth must not only be believed; it must be OBEYED (II Thess. 1:7-9; Matt. 7:21-23; et al.). In particular (as the culmi-

nating act of faith in becoming a Christian) one, as a penitent believer in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, must be baptized (immersed) in water in the name of (by the authority of) Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38; II Tim. 2:10; Gal. 3:26-27).

8. It is also the case that the providence of God (in connection with His eternal purpose) provides men with the message (in the Bible) that men must live sacrificial lives in order to be saved eternally (Rev. 2:10; Phil. 1:19-26; Luke 14:26-27; 9:23-26; II Peter 1:5-11).

9. The church (the one body of Christ) has been provided by God. It is the body of people who have been saved by the blood of Jesus Christ (Heb. 9:22; Eph. 1:7; Rom. 5:8-9; Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:25-32). How marvelous is the providence of God in providing the church!

Two of the greatest needs of man are to grasp the significance of this declaration and to love God with all of his heart, soul, mind and strength (Matt. 22:34-40).

The cross is God's greatest declaration of His love for all the world (John 3:16).

PART IV

GOD'S PROVIDENCE AND MAN'S SUFFERING

Jesus said,

In the world ye have tribulation (John 16:33).

This statement is fulfilled almost every day in the lives of each one of us human beings. In each life – some less, some more – tribulation, adversity, pain, suffering, and miseries of various sorts occur. Some people suffer because of illness, some because of tragic accidents, some because of heartbreak within their respective family, some because of the loss of property, reputation, etc., some because of grievous sins.

A little boy cries, *“Why did my Mommy die? I prayed for her, but God did not make her well. I do not believe*

in God. He must not be good since He let my Mommy die!"

A mother cries out, *"Why was my child born with neither arms nor legs? How could God have allowed this to happen?"*

A husband desperately laments, *"How could my wife have been unfaithful to me?"*

A young mother lying in a hospital bed, desperately ill with cancer, cries out, *"How could God have let this happen? How can I leave my two beautiful babies without a mother? How can I leave my husband?"*

A man lies on a hospital bed, waiting for the attendants to take him to the operating room. He knows that he is not likely to survive the operation. He knows that he will – if he dies – leave his loving wife and several small children. *"Why will not God save me from this horrible situation? Is not God good? If so, why will He not save me?"*

Obviously, unless there is some answer from God Himself, there will be no satisfactory solution. Is there an answer from God? Yes, there is. The Bible sets it out in a number of separate passages. The Bible warns (in the beginning chapters of Genesis) that man – having been cast out of the Garden of Eden – will face suffering (some of it will be mild but some of it will be very serious indeed).

The Bible teaches that suffering can be of great value to us if one responds to it as God's will teaches us to do. Let us look – very briefly – at just a few very crucial passages.

The Psalmist says,

Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I observe thy word (Psm. 119:67).

In the same section, the Psalmist says,

It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes (Psm. 119:71).

It is clear that suffering and affliction *can* be very helpful in one's learning and observing the word of God. Thus, it is further clear that suffering can be providential in helping one to walk with God.

From these passages, it is obvious that suffering and affliction can be conducive to bringing one to God. (On the other hand, if one reacts incorrectly [in disobedience], suffering can be severely destructive, spiritually speaking. Suffering can drive one *away from* God. God intends for His word to be of great light and great protection to people in times of tribulation.

The Holy Spirit guided the Psalmist to say,

For the Lord is a sun and shield: the Lord will give grace and glory; no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly. O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee (Psm. 84:11-12).

This passage makes clear that tribulation might be compared to a very dark and treacherous cave in which one is lost – while suffering from an intense pain – and cannot find his way out of the cave. In such a situation, the person involved needs both *light* (to guide him out of the darkness) and a *shield* (to protect from the pain and various dangers). These two figures are especially good to explain what our best reaction to severe suffering should be.

Life is a “*battlefield*” on which great battles will be fought. For many people those battles will be fought in darkness (they do not see God as a light) and without their having a shield to protect them from individual dangers.

But, no matter how grievous may be the suffering and the dangers, God assures us that His blessings (His providence) will be at work in our lives. Perhaps the sufferings will not always result in the salvation of the one(s) involved, but they will work to save those who react *properly* to God's providence.

1. To understand the providence of God, one

must have a clear view of the crucial terms which are involved.

2. There are some specifics, as to what God has provided, with what one must be familiar in order to apprehend the heart of the providence of God in the lives of human beings.

3. The cross – with all that it means, with all that it tells men about God, man, sin, grace, salvation, et al. – is at the heart of the providence of God.

4. Suffering afflictions and tribulations – like a very sharp knife – can either help or hurt a person, depending upon whether he “*grasps it by the handle or the blade*” (that is, it depends upon whether one reacts to tribulation in loving faith in God or with faithless resentment of the suffering).

May God help each of us to grow day by day in knowledge of the providence of God as it relates to His eternal purpose.

Chapter 3

Providence And The Eternal Purpose Of God

Thomas B. Warren

As regards the eternal purpose of God, Paul said:

8 Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, was this grace given, to preach unto the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; 9 and to make all men see what is the dispensation of the mystery which for ages hath been hid in God who created all things; 10 to the intent that now unto the principalities, and the powers in the heavenly places might be made known through the church the manifold wisdom of God, 11 according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord; 12 in whom we have boldness and access in confidence through our faith in him. 13 Wherefore I ask that ye may not faint at my tribulations for you, which are your glory. (Eph. 3:8-13).

The eternal purpose of God is inextricably related to His providence. This chapter is about that relationship.

PART I

Some Introductory Thoughts

1. Through the Word (who became flesh, John 1:14), God created all things which exist (other than Himself, who is, of course, self-existent). See Genesis 1:1; John 1:1-2; Isaiah 45:18; et al. In regard to the world, God did at least the following things.

He planned it as a result of and in harmony with His eternal purpose (Eph. 2:8-13). Thus, it can be said truthfully that God (1) planned the universe, including the earth (Isa. 45:18), (2) He created the universe,

including the earth (Gen. 1:1; Isa. 45:18), (3) God has provided all that exists other than Himself (the Godhead, John 1:1-2), (4) He continuously preserves the universe (including all inanimate elements, animate elements [including plant and animal life]), and all rational (human) life (this includes, of course, the earth and all other inanimate components of the universe), (5) He provides for situations which are needed for the proper exercise of free will (Matt. 11:28-30; Josh. 24:14-15); but that (6) while God intervenes today in a “*providential, way*” He does not intervene in any *miraculous* way.

2. If such be the case, how can men know that God does intervene “*providentially?*” The answer to this question is: because His Word plainly teaches that He is so involved. He has not simply created the universe (with all of the things [including human beings] which live in it) and “*thrown it out into space*” only to completely forsake all that is in it (including all human beings; cf. Deism). Let some facts which are taught in the Bible be noted carefully.

God created the world and thus provided man with a place of habitation. He created man with free will (see Gen. 1-3). Thus man had to have a situation in which to exercise his free will and be responsible for what he decided. In the Garden of Eden, God told man that he could freely eat of every tree which was in the Garden, with one exception: the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:16-17; 3:1-24). God spoke His truth to man. He demanded – on pain of penalty – that man obey that truth. Thus, God provided a situation in which man could be either righteous (obedient) or unrighteous (disobedient). Both woman and man chose to be disobedient. These are the steps in their disobedience: (a) after having heard the truth (God’s word to them), they heard a lie (false doctrine) from the serpent, (2) they believed the lie, and (3) obeyed the lie. In doing so, they died spiritually and God cast them out of the Garden, thereby shutting them away from the Tree of Life (Gen. 3:1-24).

Thus, it is clear that men can react improperly to what God provides for him (instructions, situations, goals, warnings, promises, et al.).

It must be noted that men lost access to the Tree of Life by hearing, believing, and obeying a lie. The basic message of the Bible is that one who sinned (heard, believed and obeyed a lie [false doctrine]) can regain that access (eternal life in heaven, Matt. 25:46) only by hearing, believing, and obeying the truth of God in regard to such.

3. So it is that “*God’s providence*” (as it is used in this chapter) entails the following matters.

(1) **God’s eternal purpose** in creating inanimate nature, animate nature (including both plant and animal life), and rational (human) nature. God created all of this, and He continues to be concerned with all of it. He is, of course, primarily concerned with human beings (who will be either in heaven or hell forever – there will never be an end to any human being [no one can kill the soul of another person, Matt. 10:28]).

(2) **God’s providence**, then, is concerned with the total situation of the eternity which lies beyond the temporary existence of the physical universe and animate nature.

(3) **The Providence of God** is also concerned with matters which exist or occur “*between the two eternities.*” During at least some of this period of time, God performed miracles. However, what God provided for men by way of the *miraculous* ended with the close of the apostolic age. This means that since the death of the last apostle (and of the last person upon whom the apostles laid hands for the impartation of some miraculous gifts), there have been no miracles. (Study carefully: (a) I Corinthians 13:8-13, which teaches that when the revelation of the New Testament Scripture (“that which is perfect”) was completed, then miraculous gifts (that which is in part) would cease and (b) since the end of the Apostolic age, God’s dealings with men in order to the

accomplishment of His purposes can accurately be said to be confined to (1) “*special*” providence – His help to faithful Christians (Matt. 7:7-11) and (2) His “*general*” providence – His response in all realms other than that which He gives to faithful Christians in some special way (not miraculous, but peculiar to faithful Christians) and which includes all of inanimate nature, animate nature, and all humans who are not faithful to God.

However, it must be noted that God sends the sunshine and the rain on both the just and the unjust (Matt. 5:45). However, God expects His spiritual children to have a higher standard than the unjust (non-Christians) have (Matt. 5:43-48). God ever seeks to lead the unjust to become just and to lead the just to remain just (and even to grow as such, II Peter. 1:5-11; 3:18).

4. There is a role for tribulation, suffering, perplexity, et al. in the total scheme of the providence of God. There is, in fact, a value to tribulation. The Psalmist said,

Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word (Psm. 119:67).

The same writer said,

It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes (Psm. 119:71).

Again, the same writer said,

Unless thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine afflictions (Psm. 119:92).

Thus, it is very clear that tribulation can be of great benefit to the sufferer. However, it can also drive one into despair to such an extent that faith is lost and the sufferer rebels against God.

In the providence of God, suffering may come into one’s life. If such should be the case with some individual, he must carefully evaluate and properly react to the situation. The apostle Paul emphasized that those who

suffer must not faint (spiritually) even if one recognizes that his physical body is perishing because of some illness. He pleaded for men to recognize that physical suffering during earthly life is “*light*” in comparison with the “*eternal weight of glory*” which will belong to those who are “*faithful unto death*” (Rev. 2:10). The sufferer should also remember that earthly affliction is “*but for a moment*” (only a brief time) on earth while what the faithful person gains when earthly life is over is eternal (unending) (II Cor. 4:16-18). So, it is clear that in this marvelous passage, the suffering of God’s faithful children is seen to be (a) light – not heavy, (b) brief (for the moment) – not eternal, and (c) something which can make contribution to one’s being faithful to God and, thus, gaining eternal glory in heaven.

It is true, of course, that some suffering which some human beings are forced to endure seems to be anything other than light. Some suffering is – to earthly beings – both heavy and long-lasting. But this is by mere human standards. In a comparative sense (human viewpoint compared with divine viewpoint) is – or at least *can* be – very, very heavy. But, providentially, human suffering is very light in comparison with the great goals of a Christian. May every sufferer learn to evaluate his pain and unhappiness in the light of how God wants him to react to his suffering; that is, by repenting of his sins and being faithful in obeying the gospel of Jesus Christ (cf.: II Cor. 12:1-21).

Also, suffering is light in comparison with what the sufferer actually deserves. Every sinner actually *deserves* death (that is, eternal separation from God and everything that is good, in the hell that has been prepared for the devil and his angels).

Again, note that human suffering is very light in comparison with the great blessing of having one’s sins forgiven. If one reacts properly, tribulation can lead one to turn from loving the things of Satan to loving the things of God (Psm. 119:67).

It should be clear that tribulation can be of great

benefit to the person involved in the suffering. A mere listing of some of these might be helpful. It can help the sufferer (a) to know himself, (b) to attain a proper (accurate) set of values, (c) to be thankful for his blessings, (d) to avoid self-pity, (e) to see the value of prayer which is deeply heart-felt, (f) to see that it may be a great blessing not to be able to see what the future holds for him, (g) to better understand the Fatherhood and love of God, (h) to better see the weakness of himself and the infinite strength of God, (i) to better understand the love which others have for him, (j) to better understand the love which he himself either has or ought to have for others, (k) to help him to have a clearer view of his own faults, his own sins, (l) to have a more sympathizing view of the faults of others, (m) to help him to better understand the value of a kind deed – a soothing word, a touch of the hand, and so on, (n) to be better able to see that the darkest hour may precede those which are the brightest of his life, (o) to help the sufferer to realize that some mountain tops (of spiritual attainment) can be reached only by going through the valley which surrounds the mountain, (p) to help him to understand the value of chastening from God just as was the case with chastening from his earthly father (Heb. 12:5-13), (q) God's providence can show men the value of tears, making him more understanding of the tears of others – it is good for one to cry in order to feel for others who do so (cf. Psm. 119:71), (r) suffering may enable one to better understand that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God (Rom. 10:17), and, (s) among other values, this section is brought to a close by calling attention to the possibility that tribulation may help the sufferer to “*start over*” and get on the track of faithfulness to God, who saves only the obedient (Heb. 5:8-9).

Having looked at some of the values of suffering, pain and tribulation, it seems in order to consider at least some of the benefits of such. It was noted just above that, in order for one to benefit from suffering, he must properly react to that suffering. When one does not react

to suffering in the right way, he can be destroyed – or at least severely hurt – by his suffering.

When one does not react properly to suffering, it can cause him to despair. Soldiers marching on a parade ground, to the cadence of a military band, may *appear* to be very brave men. However, the parade ground is not the place where bravery is tested. Bravery is tested when one faces the bombs and shells of his enemy. A man who *appears* brave while he is on the parade ground may show himself to be a coward when “*the going gets rough*” in the heat of actual battle). Just as it is with soldiers of the army of a nation, so it may be with “*soldiers*” in the “*army of Christ*,” the church. They are to “*fight the good fight of faith*” (I Tim. 6:12), but when the test of truly standing up for the truth (the gospel) comes, some soldiers show themselves to be spiritual cowards. Suffering may cause one to lose his faith in God.

Thus, one must prepare, as best he can, for suffering. He must understand that suffering can come to the righteous as well as to the wicked. Each should remember that God knows each person individually and that Satan knows each person individually (cf. the Book of Job). Further, one must understand that God requires that men be faithful even in the midst of dire circumstances. But, there is also the need to remember (and utilize) the great value of prayer on the part of faithful Christians. Another crucial matter is that of the immortality of the soul – physical death is not the end of any human being (Matt. 10:28).

Still further, one must make his life a daily walk with Jesus Christ, following Him as the perfect example (I Peter 2:21). One must learn to live one day at a time, always seeking first the kingdom of God (Matt. 6:33-34) and making it a habit of his life to avoid anxiety (Phil. 4:4-7). It is crucially important for each suffering person to look for the providence of God in the total situation in which he is involved. One can best prepare to unflinchingly meet tribulation by truly living in hope of eternal

life, with deep faith that God wants every person to be saved (II Peter 3:9; John 3:16; Mark 16:15-16; et al.) and that the totality of His providential activity is calculated toward that end (Rom. 8:1-5; 5:7-8).

Let each person remember: where one door has closed to our hopes and dreams, he should look for the opening of another door which may bring even greater opportunities. Even in the face of very severe tribulation, one must not conclude that God derives any pleasure out of seeing the spiritually valuable hopes and dreams of men both crushed and destroyed. In circumstances in which they suffer some great tragedy, some people react by saying something like this, *“Now isn’t that just like God to let such a thing happen!”* What a tragically wrong view of God.

PART II

Brief Discussion Of Some Biblical Passages Which Help Men To Know God As He Really Is – Especially As To His Providence

On one occasion Jesus said,

And this is life eternal, that they should know thee the only true God, and him whom thou didst send, even Jesus Christ (John 17:3).

To understand the providence of God, one must first understand God. God enables men to do this by revealing Himself both in nature (Psm. 19:1-5; Rom. 1:20-21) and in the totality of the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments. So, God has revealed Himself to men in the Bible by the means of *“simple”* things. He compares Himself, in certain ways, to various things with which men are already familiar. Below, we will study, for example, how God uses a shepherd, a host, a father, a mother, a friend, one who loves greatly, and so. on.

1. God describes Himself under the figure of a shepherd (Psm. 23:1-4). This means that God, in describing His providence, says to men, I will provide for you in much the same way that a shepherd provides for his sheep. He makes clear that His people will not “*want*” (they will not lack for what they *really* need – they will not lack for anything that is really good for them, cf. John 10:11). The faithful shepherd leads his sheep to lie down in green pastures. All of the comforts of life which men have, they have from God’s gracious hand. Truly spiritual men are deeply thankful for even a very little. Evil men can regard even greatest abundance as a mere pittance (Psm. 37:16; Prov. 15:16-17; et al.). God enables His faithful saints to “*lie down*” amidst the varied affairs of life in peace and contentment (Phil. 4:4-7). He leads them beside still waters. God provides men not only with food and shelter but also with the spiritual strength to meet tribulation with peace and contentment (I Peter 5:7). He leads them by His Word (and various situations of life) in the paths of righteousness. Even when one has sinned grievously, God stands ready to forgive (upon the basis of genuine repentance) and will “*restore their souls*” if indeed they do repent (See II Sam. 12, re David and Nathan).

The Psalmist goes on to affirm that even though he may walk through “*the valley of the shadow of death,*” he will not fear evil. Why not? Because God is (and will be) with him. This tells us that there are no situations in the life of a righteous man in which he cannot depend upon the special providence of God. God, as shepherd, will both guide and protect His sheep, even in the most spiritually dangerous situations. We must not expect miracles, but we should, in deep and abiding faith, expect God’s providence to bless us.

2. God also describes Himself under the figure of the host of an abundant banquet of good things (Psm. 23:5-6). The curtain has been drawn on the “*play*” which featured God as a shepherd, and it now opens with the

stage set to show the graciousness of the host of a banquet. God gives His people His special providence. While the banquet may seem meager to some men, those who understand the will and providence of God know that it is otherwise. How wonderful it is to learn that God (as the host) will prepare this table for His faithful people “*in the presence of*” their enemies. This tells us that God’s help for His people is never either too little or too late!

3. God describes His love for His people with the love of a woman for her child (Isa. 49:15-16). At times, even a Christian may forget the loving providence of God (feeling that God has forgotten him). But God asks,

Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb?

How do women feel about the children to which they have given birth? Surely at least most of them love those children more than their own lives. But, God says, there are exceptions. There are women who *do* forget even the child at her breast. But God will *never* forget His people. Rather, He has each one engraved upon the palms of His hands. Each one – with all of his problems and triumphs – are ever before God. As unlikely as it is that a woman would forget the child at her breast, yet it is still the case that some do. But such is not even possible with God: He will never forget His people. The loving providence of God is ever in force for His faithful people.

One can see more of this same basic affirmation (regarding the loving care which is ordinarily manifested by human fathers and mothers) in Matthew 7:7-11. First, Jesus says that men should ask, seek, and knock. He then asks which of them (as a human father), if his son should ask for bread, would give him a stone upon which to chew? Or, He says, if your son asks for a fish, will you give him a serpent (by which to be killed perhaps)? Jesus then sets out a sound argument: if you

human fathers (who are evil) will give good things to those who ask him for them, can you not understand that God (your heavenly Father) will give good things to those who ask Him? This argument from Jesus demands the conclusion that God will never turn a deaf ear to the appropriate pleas of His people. (Of course, one must not ask amiss; he must always modify requests with, “*If it be thy will.*” See, e.g., James 4:3, 15). Jesus instructs men to ask, seek, and knock. If one asks as he should (being on “*praying grounds*” with God [men are at times not qualified to do what they are amenable to do]) and if they ask according to his will, they will receive. If they seek what God wishes them to seek, they will find it. If they knock on the doors upon which God wishes them to knock, then those doors will be opened to them. While we human beings may not understand all of the details of just how these things may be accomplished (other than knowing that they are not accomplished by miraculous power), we still can know that they will be accomplished when the conditions are met. How do we know this? Simply because God affirmed it, and that settles the matter!

4. God plainly affirms that men should trust Him (Prov. 3:5-6). This passage involves three basic points: (1) men should trust in the Lord, (2) in all one’s ways one is to acknowledge Him, and (3) as a result, God will direct their paths. To live a life of trusting in God is to live a life of taking God at His Word (that is, obeying His Word with all of one’s heart). Abraham was a classic example of this (note Rom. 4:20-21). What does the passage under consideration really teach about the providence of God? It teaches (1) that one is to trust in the Lord with all of his heart (that is, without reservation), (2) that one is not to lean upon his own understanding (one is not to substitute mere human doctrine for divine doctrine, cf. Gal. 1:6-9; II John 9-11), (3) one is to acknowledge God (obey Him, be submissive to Him) in all – not merely a few which one might especially like – of His ways (cf. the life

of Paul, Phil. 1:20-21), and (4) as a result, God will direct one's paths. This is the "special" providence of God. Thus, it is clear that men are to believe that God both can and will do what He has said He will do. Further, men must be wise and loving enough to do what He has told us He wants us to do (John 14:15, 21; I John 5:3). Every man who does these things will be doing what is best for himself. This is the case because doing such brings him under the saving power of the blood of Christ (Rom. 5:7-8; 8:1-5; II Tim. 2:10; Gal. 3:26-27; II Tim. 4:1-8; et al.). During the Christian age (since the first day of Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ, Acts 2), God's special providence is directed in a special way at faithful Christians (especially in answer to their prayers) and also to unfaithful Christians in efforts to bring them to repentance. Also, it must be noted that, while no alien sinner can be saved without learning, loving and obeying the gospel of Christ, the providence of God works (non-miraculously) in their lives to bring them to see and obey the truth.

There are many, many other similar passages in the Bible. I refer to passages which plainly teach that being a faithful child of God is so very important that, even if a good man is severely persecuted (imprisoned, etc.) or even murdered because he is faithful to Christ (cf. Rev. 2:10), at least two great truths are evident: (1) a good man who dies for the faith will go on to be with God eternally (cf. Phil. 1:20-21) and (2) as the old saying goes, "*the blood of martyrs is the seed of the church*" (consider how faithful people feel about Jesus, John the baptist, Stephen, Paul, et al.).

5. It is also the case that the teaching of the Bible in regard to the general problem of punishment can be very helpful in understanding the providence of God. (Lack of space prevents anything more than a few words about this matter.) The Bible both explains and warns about punishment for sin. (1) The teaching of the Bible in regard to punishment functions as a *deterrent* to sin

(the Bible *warns* of the terrible results of sin), (2) What the Bible teaches on the punishment for sin is calculated to bring about *reformation* in the life of the one who has fallen into sin (this reformation must occur – if it occurs at all – during one’s life on earth; it *cannot* occur after earthly life is over, Heb. 9:27), and (3) the Bible warns that eternal punishment (the fate of all who live and die in sin) is a matter of *retribution*; that is, eternal punishment is what one *earns* (his wages) by sin (Rom. 6:23). Some people reject the doctrine of the loving providence of God because they hold that eternal punishment is simply not compatible with the concept of the infinite God. All who hold to such a theory should note that while God is omnibenevolent (infinite in goodness and love), He is also omnijust (infinite in justice and righteousness). This means that God could not merely *tolerate* sin – He could not really be the infinite God and simply overlook sin (unrighteousness) as if it had never happened. God so loved the world (of sinners) that He gave His only begotten Son to die that sinners might have the opportunity to be saved by the grace of God through the blood of Christ (Titus 2:11; Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 5:8-9; 8:1-5; Heb. 2:9; et al.). God has lovingly *provided* all men with the warning that the wages of sin is death (eternal separation from God and everything that is good once and forever more (Rom. 6:23; Matt. 25:46; 7:13-14). May all men faithfully and lovingly respond to the total providence of God.

Conclusion

The Will Of God And His Providence

May it be remembered by all that God is not willing that any should perish (II Peter 3:9). there are at least three “*phases*” of the will of God: (1) His *ideal* will – God does not want any person to ever sin even one time (I John 2:1), (2) the *circumstantial* will of God – even in the circumstance of man’s having sinned (and, thus, having put himself in the situation of deserving the “*wages*”

(what he has *earned* by his sin, Rom. 6:23), God still is not willing that any should perish. He proved this by proving His love in giving Jesus Christ to shed His blood that men might thereby be saved from the sins which could not otherwise be forgiven, Heb. 9:22; 5:8-9; Rom. 5:7-8; Eph. 1:7; et al.). (3) the *ultimate* will of God – which is to eternally bless all of the righteous (those who have obeyed Him, Heb. 5:8-9; cf. I Sam. 15:22-23; Matt. 25:46; John 5:28-29). No man can defeat the ultimate will of God. Men *can* defeat the ideal will of God (they do this when they sin for the very first time). Men can defeat the circumstantial will of God (His will in the circumstance of man's having been separated from God by having sinned. Men can defeat the circumstantial will of God simply by refusing to obey the gospel and/or, after having obeyed the gospel (and, thus, having become a Christian) to live an unfaithful life (all who are unfaithful will be lost). And (3) the ultimate will of God is (a) to save all of the righteous and (b) to eternally punish all of the unrighteous (Matt. 25:46; John 5:28-29).

It just may be the case that the providence of God can best be understood by understanding the various phases of the will of God. Thus, may God bless us to the end of understanding the “*phases*” of His sacred will (II Peter 3:9).

Chapter 4

How Do Deism And Pantheism Function As Anti-Providence Views?

Wayne Coats

Introduction

Admittedly, **deism**, **pantheism** and **providence** are not words which comprise a part of one's daily conversation; yet, we are confronted constantly with some of the ideas which adhere in these terms. Both deism and pantheism stand in flagrant conflict with the Word of God. The nature of God and His providence, as revealed in the Bible, finds no place in the philosophy of the deists and pantheists.

The inspired apostle had to confront false philosophy in his day and he met it in a marvelous manner. Never did he cower before the enemy as he made valiant defenses of the truth. Paul was careful to warn his brethren against those false systems that had developed and that would emerge in the future. To Colosse he wrote,

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ (Col. 2:8).

No two systems ever devised would come under the ban of Paul's warning more than deism and pantheism.

What Is Deism?

The concept of deism is no new order upon the earth, for indeed there are traces of the theory which

date back for hundreds of years. Deism was developed into a sort of systematized philosophy by Edward Herbert in 1624 when he published his, *“De Veritate.”* He is considered by many to be the father of deism. The term is derived from *“deus”* which denotes a god. The deist believes that a being exists which is divine, but this being differs altogether from the Jehovah God which is revealed in the Bible.

Moule declares,

Deism denotes the belief of an almighty, mighty contriver and maker of the universe, who is not actively sovereign over it, and is not immanent in it. In particular, it is a belief which declines to admit the fact (whether or no the possibility) of miraculous revelation.

It is interesting that Herbert asserted that he had a revelation from heaven which came as an encouragement to inspire his work which among other things resulted in an effort to disprove revelation. Herbert said he asked for a sign and was answered by, *“....a loud gentle noise from the heavens.”* With the information which came from the *“noise,”* Herbert proceeded to develop his system into a five point philosophy which he called, *“the divinely implanted original and indefeasible intuitions of the human mind.”* The gist of Herbert’s deistic system was expressed in five propositions as follows:

1. There is one supreme God.
2. Man should worship God.
3. This should be with piety.
4. Man should turn from evil.
5. Rewards and punishments come here and hereafter.

It apparently mattered not to Herbert as to the colossal contradictions inherent within his concoction. With reference to God and creation, Herbert contrived a scheme wherein God created the universe and endowed it with self-sustaining forces, after which he withdrew

outside the universe as a kind of God absentia. It is as if God built a house, shut himself out, locked the door, tied his hands so he could never use the door key which never existed in the first place. When God made the world He did a pretty good job and the best He could do was to leave it alone. He therefore rests as a sort of hermit God. Everything is subserviant to a rigid, self-sustaining force and God does not butt in.

We could say truthfully that to deism, God is completely **transcendent**. God, therefore, is not **omnipresent**. Their concept would completely destroy the truth of the triune Godhead and their respective work in the redemption of man. God could not and would not reconcile the world unto Himself in and through Christ. God and Christ, through the revelatory work of the Holy Spirit, would not and could not convict men of sin and turn them from idols to serve the true and living God. The revealed written word is therefore unnecessary. With his concept of God, there is no possible way for the deist to believe in the providence of God. Since God has taken a long journey and is "*at rest*," He leaves the affairs of men and nations to tick alone, as would the pendulum of a clock. There is no reason to pray to a deistic god for the system is completely fatalistic.

What Is Pantheism?

We are aware that man has evermore been prone to adore, worship and pay homage to the various components of the solar system. The sun and moon have been worshipped for centuries in various ways. Some have thought that since the heavenly bodies were changing locations in relationship to the earth, then they must have possessed life and thus man should look upon them as gods.

Without an understanding of and an appreciation for the revelation of God, men will usually develop some sort of idolatrous system. The creature replaces the creator. This has been the record of pantheism.

Pantheism is a modified, refined form of polytheism. It is exceedingly difficult to give a simple definition of pantheism in all its forms, but generally it denotes the idea of identifying God and the universe. The universe is God, and God is the universe, and this is **the ALL**. The word is derived from “*pan*” which means all and “*theos*” which means God; thus we have, “*All is God and God is all.*” This means that there is no God separate from nature and all the natural order must be construed as one with all. He or it is the sole cause and the sole effect. The god of pantheism is supposedly infinite, but also he is forever remade in an ongoing process of growth subject to continuous change and modification. The pantheism would say that God is not the maker of the watch, but he is the watch, a part of its totality.

God must never be thought of as distinct from the universe, according to the pantheist. Everything emanates from God and therefore right and wrong, good and evil, is not a personal choice for man. A robot cannot have duties nor observe the beautitudes. Like the wind, man really has no such things as **conduct**.

Obviously, there is no place in pantheism for the providence of God. If the monism of the system is true, then the universe is reduced to a unity, the unit is God, and God is the universe. In this scheme of things there would be no possibility for miracles. Being devoid of personality, man, as a sort of bubble on the great ocean, soon bursts and sinks forever into a stable of unconsciousness, probably absorbed into the felicity of something.

The Mixture Isn't Right

An aged stone mason examined the mortar which was supposed to hold the stones together. As he crumbled the weak and granular mortar in his hands, he said, “*Something's wrong. The mixture isn't right.*” He knew for a fact that too much sand had been used in the mixture and that destroyed the strength of the mortar

and the structure fell.

Deism and pantheism are mostly sand. They have no strength and will not stand the tests of valid and sound arguments made in opposition to them. Although Herbert supposedly had a revelation, his deism precludes any revelation as is given in the Bible. This means that every word and syllable of the inspired word of God is merely a figment of feeble imaginations.

Without a divine revelation we would be forever in abysmal ignorance as to the divine attributes of God. Is there one, or are there many gods? Is He a loving father, or is He a tyrant? Is He totally eminent, totally transcendent, or is He both eminent and transcendent in keeping with His will?

We know that God is not a hermit residing way off out yonder. Man will hardly worship a God who has no relation with men. The Bible clearly teaches that God in His providence is near, at hand, and can be expected to help us. Believing in the providence of God, we thus pray to God.

When we try to explore the god of pantheism, we behold a god of variableness and change, even as nature changes. This bizarre system will not allow the creator to be over the creature, for they are one as a unit. Man therefore has no real need to depend upon God.

The Provident View

It should be comforting and assuring to every child of God to read from the precious pages of the Bible where our heavenly Father has not abandoned us but continues to exercise providential care, concern and control over us.

1. God Controls The Universe

So much help is given in the Bible along this line and we need not despair, even though there may be times when we desire answers. The Bible states,

...his kingdom ruleth over all (Psm. 103:19).

He

...doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth... (Dan. 4:35).

He

...worketh all things after the counsel of his own will (Eph. 1:11).

God thundereth ... By the breath of God frost is given (Job 37:5, 10).

He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle (Psm. 104:14).

Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places ... vapours ... lightnings ... wind (Psm. 135:6-7).

He

...maketh his sun to rise ... sendeth rain ... (Matt. 5:45).

He clothes

...the grass of the field ... (Matt. 6:30).

He feeds the

... fowls of the air (Matt. 6:26).

2. In His Providence He Rules Over The Nations

Job declared,

He increaseth the nations, and destroyeth them: he enlargeth the nations, and he straiteneth them again (John 12:23).

The Psalmist wrote,

...the kingdom is the Lord's and he is the governor among the nations (Psm. 22:28).

He ruleth by his power forever; his eyes behold the nations... (Psm. 66:7).

Paul preached, He

...hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation (Acts 17:26).

3. He Protects The Righteous And Provides For Them

Thousands of years ago the psalmist sang,

I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety (Psm. 4:8).

He also said,

...with favour wilt thou compass him as with a shield (Psm. 5:12).

Again,

...thy right hand upholdeth me (Psm. 63:8).

With full trust in God he declared,

...he that keepeth thee will not slumber (Psm. 121:3).

It was this confidence in Jehovah that caused Abraham to say,

...Jehovah-jireh (Gen. 22:8, 14).

And of course, God did provide. Moses wrote,

...man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live (Deut. 8:3).

...my God shall supply all your need.... (Phil. 4:19).

4. He Promises To Hear Our Prayers

David wrote,

They that go down to the sea in ships ... mount up to the heavens, they go down again to the depths ... and are at their wits end. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble and he bringeth them out of their distresses (Psm. 107:23-28).

Paul used an analogy when he wrote,

Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ (II Cor. 2:14).

We must not think that God will allow us to misappropriate the purpose of prayer. Prayer should be poured forth from a heart which believes that God is and will answer according to His will. Prayer must not be that which is expressed by one who thinks of it as a boot-strap exercise. This results in a dumb-bell exercise by certain performers. Jesus said,

...what things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them (Mark 11:24).

This was spoken to His disciples who would be cared for as they went forth preaching. David wrote,

I love the Lord, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications (Psm. 116:1).

The apostle wrote that the Spirit,

...helpeth our infirmities for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered (Rom. 8:26).

After we have done our part we need to,

Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him (Psm. 37:7).

No passage in all literature breathes with compassion and the providence of God more than that expressed in Psalm 23. The Shepherd does provide for His sheep. Our Lord has promised,

.... I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world (Matt. 28:20).

Let us never become faint-hearted nor faithless as we travel along the perilous journey for indeed, "*the Lord is at hand*" (Phil. 4:5). This has reference not to time but to place. Because of the providence of a loving God, one can sing, "*Guide Me O Thou Great Jehovah*" until twilight comes and the shadows flee away.

Chapter 5

The Meaning Of Providence In Contrast To Anti-Providence Views

Jerry Moffitt

Webster says of **Providence**:

a often cap: divine guidance or care **b** cap: God conceived as the power sustaining and guiding human destiny.¹

Through the years I have noticed that some brethren are very committed to the concept of providence, while others are weakly committed to the concept if they believe in it at all. This writer believes in real providence of God very deeply, but still, after his discussion of providence in this manuscript, wants to protect the doctrine from erroneous and harmful aberrations.

We will make a Biblical case for providence; then we will study some anti-Providence viewpoints. Let us start.

THE BIBLICAL CASE FOR PROVIDENCE

New Testament Words And Concepts

The word **Providence**, as we use it, is not found in Scripture. The Greek *pronoia* is translated “Providence” in Acts 24:2. It literally means “forethought” (*pro*, before, and *noeo*, to think).² *Pronoio* (“to take thought for, provide”)³ is used in Romans 12:17; II Corinthians 8:21,

and I Timothy 5:8, but not in the sense of the Providence of God. However, we will quickly notice many other words used which establish the concept of God sustaining human destiny and guiding and providing for individuals, especially those who call upon Him in truth. The first passage which comes to this writer's mind is found in Hebrews 4:16:

Let us therefore draw near with boldness unto the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help us in time of need.

Mercy means more than pity. It is "*the outward manifestation of pity.*" ⁴When God has mercy on us, as we approach Him in prayer, something outwardly manifests itself in our life. *Grace* simply means gift or favor. We approach the throne of grace and get a gift or a favor in the time of our need.

Another passage, close by, is Hebrews 2:18:

For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted.

Succor is from the Greek *boetheo* which means to come to the aid of someone. It is from *boe*, to shout, and *theo*, to run, and literally means to run to the aid of someone who shouts. How can God help, succor, or come to the aid of someone without imposing Himself in human affairs?

In this age the Christian is promised tribulation (John 16:33). We are children of God and joint-heirs with Christ if we suffer with Him. Yet Peter says:

After that ye have suffered a little while, [the God of all grace] shall himself perfect, establish, strengthen you (I Pet. 5:10).

These words are correlatives of *Providence*. When God perfects us, establishes us, strengthens us, He is providing for us. He does something, gives us something, sustains or guides us. Circumstances are altered; prob-

lems calm down; refreshment pervades our life. Hebrews 4:16 says we draw near the throne of grace — I think in prayer — and we receive grace and mercy in any time of need. James puts it this way,

Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you
(James 4:8).

We reach a point in our suffering where God says “*Enough!*” It is used of mending nets in Matthew 4:21. It is used of God framing the universe (Heb. 11:3). God mends us. He does something. He frames out our situation. He establishes us and strengthens us. The time is of God’s choosing, so we suppose the acts are all of God’s Providence.

Some think of some mysterious leading of the Holy Spirit, but the Bible says nothing of that. It speaks of God the Father, and even of Jesus as being active in Providence. Notice what Jesus says,

And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do (John 14:13).

One needs only to turn to the first three chapters of Revelation to see how active Jesus is in the affairs of the church and of the world. And though the Bible teaches that, it still does not teach that we should pray to Jesus.

How else will we describe Providence? What words are Biblical correlatives of *Providence*? Notice Matthew 7:7-11:

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you; for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

Does God intervene in the life of the child of God who depends on Him? He “*gives,*” “*opens,*” and makes him to “*find.*” Is this type of activity what Jesus means when he says, “*And lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end*”

of the world" (Matt. 28:20)? Is not this the type of interference in our problems that Paul meant when he said:

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your forbearance be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. In nothing be anxious; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God (Phil. 4:4-6).

It seems evident to this writer that Paul believed in this type of watchcare from God. When on trial, he said things happened this way:

The Lord stood by me, and strengthened me...And I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. The Lord will deliver me from every evil work, and will save me unto his heavenly kingdom; to whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen" (II Tim. 4:17-18).

We should not forget, that as in the case of Hebrews 4:16, James 4:8 and especially Matthew 7:7-11, that the Providence of God is intimately connected with personal prayer. Along that line James says,

Ye have not, because he ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may spend it in your pleasures" (James 4:2-3).

Too, it is unanswerable that Providence is simply God doing something. Paul expressed it thusly:

Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all generations for ever and ever. Amen" (Eph. 3:20-21).

Providence is when the power of Christ rests on us. Paul said, *"Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me"* (II Cor. 12:9). The Lord had said to Paul, *"My grace is sufficient for thee: for my power is made perfect in*

weakness" (II Cor. 12:9). Again notice the Lord uses the word grace (Gk. *charis*) which means a gift or favor. Vine says in II Corinthians 9:8 grace means "*the sum of earthly blessings.*"^s Christ uses the word *power*. *Dunamis* can be used of a miracle, but in this case it seems to simply mean mighty works or deeds. The outcome, as Paul described it regarding us, is when the God of peace "*shall bruise Satan under your feet*" (Rom. 16:20).

And finally, we would not argue with the fact that God may provide us with chastening (Heb. 12:5-13; Rev. 3:19). And in the first age of the church — though not now — God also provided for his saints in miraculous ways. All that may be considered as providence.

So what are some New Testament words and concepts? We have found they are "*mercy*", "*grace*", "*succor*", "*help*", "*establish*", "*perfect*", "*strengthen*", "*do*", "*given you*", "*open to you*", "*find*", "*deliver*", "*the Lord is at hand*", "*grace is sufficient*", "*power rests upon*", "*Satan bruised under our feet.*"

But let us not stop here. Let us notice some Old Testament concepts. We shall do so by printing, without comment, some Old Testament passages which describe or verify the providence of God under various words, expression, or concepts. Notice:

In peace will I both lay me down and sleep; For thou, Jehovah, alone makest me dwell in safety (Psm. 4:8).

Our fathers trusted in thee: They trusted, and thou didst deliver them (Psm. 22:4).

When my father and mother forsake me, Then Jehovah will take me up (Psm. 27:10).

Jehovah is my strength and my shield; My heart hath trusted in him, and I am helped (Psm. 28:7).

Let me not be put to shame, O Jehovah; for I have called upon thee (Psm. 31:17).

He preserveth the souls of his saints; He delivered

them out of the hand of the wicked (Psm. 97:10).

In the day when I call answer me speedily (Psm. 102:2).

Then they cried unto Jehovah in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses (Psm. 107:6).

The angel of Jehovah encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them (Psm. 34:7).

Many are the afflictions of the righteous; But Jehovah delivereth him out of them all (Psm. 34:19).

Delight thyself also in Jehovah; and he will give thee the desires of thy heart. Commit thy way unto Jehovah; Trust also in him, and he will bring it to pass (Psm. 37:4-5).

For the arms of the wicked shall be broken; But Jehovah upholdeth the righteous (Psm. 37:17).

A man's goings are established of Jehovah; and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; For Jehovah upholdeth him with his hand (Psm. 37:23-24).

I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread (Psm. 37:25).

For Jehovah loveth justice, and forsaketh not his saints; They are preserved forever (Psm. 37:28).

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble (Psm. 46:1).

Cast thy burden upon Jehovah, and he will sustain thee: He will never suffer the righteous to be moved (Psm. 55:22).

My soul waiteth in silence for God only: From him cometh my salvation. He only is my rock and my salvation: he is my high tower; I shall not be greatly

moved (Psm. 62:1-2).

No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly (Psm. 84:11).

Out of my distress I called upon Jehovah: Jehovah answered me and set me in a large place (Psm. 118:5).

Trust in Jehovah with all thy heart, and lean not upon thine own understanding: In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he will direct thy paths (Prov. 3:5-6).

When a man's ways please Jehovah, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him (Prov. 16:7).

The horse is prepared against the day of battle; But victory is of Jehovah (Prov. 21:31).

The fear of man bringeth a snare; But whoso putteth his trust in Jehovah shall be safe (Prov. 29:25).

Every word of God is tried: He is a shield unto them that take refuge in him (Prov. 30:5).

Summary Of Old Testament Passages

First, we notice, among others, the various words used for God's help: *"deliver," "helped," "preserveth," "answer," "give," "upholdeth," established," "forsaketh not," "fulfil," "save," "direct."*

Second, God is described under various figures: *"Strength," "Shield," "Refuge," "Rock," "Salvation," and "High Tower."*

Third, we notice various concepts: God is said to make us safe, to deliver us, to take us up, to help us and not let us be put to shame. He will preserve us, answer us, give us our desires, bring our needs to pass, uphold us, establish our goings, not forsake us, help in trouble, and not let us be moved. He will withhold no good thing; he will fulfill our desire, save us, direct us, grant us victory, make us safe, and shield us.

Fourth, there are in these passages, certain limitations and prerequisites. Some of them that are mentioned are that we *“trust,” “call on Him,” “fear Him,” “be righteous,” “delight in Him,” “commit our way unto Him,” “cast our burden upon Him,” “wait for Him in silence,” “walk uprightly,” “call on Him in truth,” “lean not on our own understanding,” “acknowledge him,” “have our ways,” “please him,” and “take refuge in Him.”* But let us look further.

What We Do Not Mean By Providence

We do not mean that God works miracles today. In the first age of the church God provided, occasionally, for his children by working miracles. But every miracle had an ulterior motive, a sort of hidden agenda: Miracles were to authenticate that people came from God, spake from God, or in some way were God’s representatives. Often God provided for the needs of his people at the same time he made his presence known to all by a miracle. He, so to speak, commonly, killed two birds with one stone. He does so no longer, since the need for miracles is over. Where He once set aside natural law by miracles, He now works through natural law by daily grace and Providence.

Two, when we speak of Providence, we do not mean some mysterious leading of the Spirit. The Spirit works powerfully in our day, but only and always through the word of God (I Cor. 2:9-13; Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12). In sanctification (John 17:17), conviction (II Tim. 3:16-17), edification (Acts 20:32), and conversion (Psm. 19:7), the Spirit works through the word. There are motives, promises, warnings, pleadings, facts, and instructions which make the Word of God the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16). Those who want to lead us into the realm of mysterious leadings, inward impulses, strange notions, funny feelings, and all kinds of subjective hocus pocus lead us away from the powerful word of God. And, they do it without book, chapter, and verse.

Three, when we acknowledge that there is a magnificent Providence of God, we do not feel we have the right to speak for God. When a person begins to say, *“God did this for me,”* or *“God acted here, or there,”* he does so without proof. We ought, like Mordecai, to say *“Who knoweth whether thou are not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”* (Esther 4:14). *“Who knows but what”* ought to be as far as we go dogmatically. God’s ways are not our ways and His thoughts are not our thoughts (Isa. 55:8-11). We ought to be cautious and not speak dogmatically about what God may or may not have done in our life. We could be wrong! So in the context of our life, with cautious faith, let us behold what seems to be the hand of God in the various incidents in our lives.

However, belief in the Providence of God, though found on almost every page of the Bible, may not be easy to perfectly maintain in our life. Let us notice concepts and viewpoints which are anti-Providence viewpoints.

Anti-Providence Viewpoints

The world does not operate on the same level as the believing Christian. The Christian is aware that God’s eyes run to and fro in all the earth (Prov. 15:3). He knows what things we have need of before we ask (Matt. 6:8). He knows our down-sitting and our up-rising, and there is not a word in our tongue but God knows it altogether (Psm. 139:1-4). He numbers the very hairs on our head (Matt. 10:30), and in Him we live and move and have our very being (Acts 17:28). Christ upholds ALL things by the word of His power (Heb. 1:3), and in Him all things hold together (Col. 1:17). So God is all in all (I Cor. 15:28). Nothing happens without God. But the world believes and acts differently, and some of the concepts they are moved by are anti-Providence. Let us notice a few of them.

Deism

*“Deism...is a naturalistic belief in the existence of a Supreme Being...Theism accepts God’s eminence and Providence in the universe, while deism conceives of God as totally apart from the universe.”*⁶ So deism is anti-Providence. It believes God wound up the universe as a clock, and He is keeping His hands away until it goes off.

Agnosticism And Atheism

Agnosticism doesn’t know if there is a God and atheism believes there is not. So neither can believe in His providential working in the affairs of men. The Christian, however, senses the hand of God in all things, working, guiding, allowing, until His purposes are all served.

Fate

Fate is described as an impersonal force which absolutely determines all events.⁷ In the ancient world it was more of a theological than a popular notion. In Greece the words used were *moira*, *moros*, or *asia* which meant simply *“allotment.”*⁸ The Romans and other civilizations held the concept under other names. But how far that concept is removed from the Christian belief that prayer alters the hand of Him who alters the universe!

Fatalism

This is similar to the concept *“fate.”* This attitude of mind accepts whatever happens as bound or decreed to happen.⁹ Determinism includes moral responsibility, as does predestination. Fatalism does not. It teaches we should resign ourselves indifferently to the course of events. *“Chance”* is somewhat different. There is no necessity for any given coincidence. Luck is involved in the same context. Though things are thought to alter luck. Fatalism believes it happens of necessity.¹⁰ However all — determinism, fatalism, and chance or luck — are anti-Providence viewpoints since they do not give credit to the guiding and sustaining activity of God.

Providence believes God does something after prayer he might not have done had one not prayed.

Other

There are other concepts which alter one's belief in a personal God responding day to day to a person's needs or desires. Let us list a few of them.

There is the belief in horoscopes, the notion the stars alter the events in our life. Or, black magic, that certain ceremonies or potions will alter the future and give one power over the future. All this is found in idolatry and paganism. And, as the true light of Christianity wanes, the world retreats more and more unto such notions. Almost without realizing it, when they put God out of their Knowledge (Rom. 1:28), they begin to gamble, as if outcomes were not capable of divine choice. They talk of mother nature, for it is almost impossible to speak of natural science and complex situations and outcomes separate and apart from a governing mind. Even as one is being taught evolution, the student hears the professor say things like, "*nature allowed for that,*" or "*mother nature is wise,*" or "*nature fixed that.*"

Even in religion there is a taint of anti-providence action, or an aberation as to how providence is put into effect. We find the lighting of lamps, the counting of beads, the sign of the cross, and other traditions of men (Matt. 15:7-9).

Conclusion

So the Christian is not motivated consciously or unconsciously by deistic independence, fate, fatalism, horoscopes, magic, potions, and other blends and shades of paganism. He is not naturalistic; nor does he believe God is moved by lighting of lamps, counting of beads, or the sign of the cross.

The Christian believes in a God who is all in all, who sustains all, who manipulates all, and who is moved by

the prayers of a righteous man (James 5:16). This man does not say, *"Today or tomorrow we will go into this city, and spend a year there, and trade and get gain"* (James 4:13). He says, *"If the Lord will, we shall both live and do this or that"* (James 4:15).

He believes in a God who is a Rock, a Tower, a Savior, who gives mercy and grace daily. He believes in a Christ who runs to us when we shout, who succors and helps us in time of need. The true Christian waits on God, hopes in Christ, and is therefore perfected, established, and strengthened. He doesn't believe in luck or make wishes. He prays. He believes in prayer! His world is not full of chance, superstition, or rank naturalism. Rather, God is on his mind, His promises of aid are fondly remembered, and he engages in prayer, supplication, and petition. God draws near to him in time of trouble; He hears his cry; He gives, opens doors, and makes it where the child of God will find. The true Christian has no amulets, no lucky pieces, no belief in a run of luck. When crisis hits, he doesn't say the Sabeans did it; the wind did it; fire did it. With Job he says, *"Jehovah gave, and Jehovah hath taken away"* (Job 1:21). To him, God is always doing something. God's hand stirs among the events of life, chipping, molding, testing, chastening, delivering, sustaining, helping, preserving, answering, giving, bringing it to pass, upholding, directing, hiding, shielding, and strengthening. The Christian is therefore totally dependent, humbled, grateful, and constantly thankful. And with all that, he would have it no other way.

Endnotes

1 Merriam-Webster, *"Providence," Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, 3rd ed. p. 929.

2 W. E. Vine, *"Provide, Providence, Provision," Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, p. 909.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid., p. 742.

- 5 Ibid., p. 510.
- 6 John T. Ford, "*Deism*," **Encyclopedia Americana**, VIII, 644.
- 7 H. J. R., "*Fate*," **Encyclopedia Britannica**, IX, 110.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Ibid., p. 109.
- 10 Ibid.

Chapter 6

What Do The Lives Of Abraham And Isaac Teach About The Providence Of God?

W. Terry Varner

It is with pleasure that I express my gratitude for the kind invitation and grateful confidence shown in me by the elders and co-directors, brethren Garland Elkins and Thomas B. Warren, to be a part of the ***First Annual Power Lectureship***. We are thrilled that this congregation joins a host of other faithful congregations in providing a sound lectureship and preserving the material in book form. The lectureship on “*The Providence of God*” is a study of one of the great Biblical subjects and humbles the mind of any student in his preparation. It is the only book on this great subject that I am aware of among the brethren. May God bless you for selecting such a theme.

The term *providence* is from the Latin *providere* and means “*to foresee*.” In the Greek, the corresponding word means “*to perceive in advance, to note before hand, to foresee, to know or to think in advance*.”¹

The New Testament uses the noun and verb form five times and translates them: (1) “*provide*” (Rom. 12:17; II Cor. 8:21; I Tim. 5:8), (2) “*provision*” (Rom. 13:14, and (3) “*providence*” (Acts 24:2). These texts suggest the idea “*to care for*” or “*to have regard to*.” The idea of *divine providence* is the continual care that God, who created all things, sustains His creation (*general*

providence) and His love, care, and concern for those who seek to do His will (*special providence*). Generally speaking, *providence* denotes “*divine guidance or care.*”²

Our study involves two points: (1) Abraham and Isaac and the providence of God and (2) the relationship between God’s providence and man’s faith.

I. Abraham And Isaac

Abraham is the Biblical example of “*a man of faith.*” Abraham is mentioned in twenty-seven of the sixty-six books of the Bible. Sixteen Old Testament books mention Abraham one hundred thirty-nine times and eleven New Testament books mention Abraham sixty-seven times.

Abraham and his kinsfolk lived in Ur of the Chaldees in Mesopotamia (Gen. 11:28). God revealed Himself to Abraham and called him to leave his roots and family in Ur and journey to “*a strange country*” (Heb. 11:9). In the light of this call, the Bible records that Abraham responded to God’s call by an obedient faith and willing heart and not by “*faith only.*” Moses records that:

Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred,...Unto a land that I will shew thee...So Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him;...” (Gen. 12:1, 4).

Paul says, “*By faith Abraham...obeyed*” (Heb. 11:8). God spoke, Abraham obeyed! It is no wonder Abraham is considered “*a man of faith.*” With Abraham, God’s call was not responded to with delay, or an attempt to substitute or change what God commanded, or to find a reason to dismiss the call. Abraham’s obedient faith was complemented by worship and gratitude, as he built altars and worshipped God on the way (Gen. 12:6-9).

In the call of Abraham, God made several promises in Genesis 12:1-3:

(1) “***I will make of thee a great nation***” (Gen. 12:2). Biblical revelation shows this promise is related to

the nation of Israel through whom God would providentially bring the Messiah. Through the development of the nation of Israel, God's *special providence* is seen in His use, development, and care of Israel so that they were a moral and spiritual influence in the world until spiritual Israel, the church/kingdom, came into existence on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ (Acts 2).

The promise of "*a great nation*" applies primarily to the nation of Israel. Its magnitude is seen in three metaphors: (1) "*the dust of the earth*" (Gen. 13:16), (2) "*the stars of heaven*" (Gen. 15:5; 22:17), and (3) "*the sand upon the seashore*" (Gen. 22:17).

Ultimately and typically, the promise applies to spiritual Israel through "*the seed,*" the Christ (cf. Gal. 3:19), in the "*holy nation*" (I Peter 2:9), the church/kingdom. Thus, Paul calls Abraham "*the father of all them that believe*" (Rom. 4:11) and "*the father of us all*" (Rom. 4:14).

While the initial promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3 applied to Israel and typically spiritual Israel, the church, God's renewal of the covenant in Genesis 17 promised Abraham that he would also be "*the father of many nations*" and that "*kings shall come out of thee*" (Gen. 17:4-6). The reality of this is seen in Ishmael, Abraham's son by Hagar, the father of the Arabs (Gen. 17:20). His descendants are listed in Genesis 25:12-16. (2) The six sons of Abraham and Keturah listed in Genesis 25:1-4. (3) The Edomite kings, whose lineage is through Esau and the descendant of Abraham through his grandson, are listed in Genesis 36.

(2) God promised to give Abraham and to his seed after him "*a land*" (Gen. 12:1; Acts 7:5). "*Unto thy seed will I give this land*" (Gen. 12:7). This was repeated in the renewals of the covenant (Gen. 13:14-17; 15:4-7, 18-21; 17:8). Later historians of Israel confirmed the promise of "*a land*" (II Chron. 20:7; Neh. 9:7). The land promise was realized by the descendants of Abraham (Num. 10:29; Josh. 21:43-45; I Kings 4:21; II Chron.

20:7; Neh. 9:7-8).

(3) God promised childless Abraham "*in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed*" (Gen. 12:3). While the promise involved his fleshly descendants, Israel, through Isaac, the promise is also spiritual in nature. While the Jews were influential in the earth by being repositories of the Old Testament (Rom. 3:2), establishing belief in one God, and helping to keep a semblance of righteousness, godliness, and morality in the earth, the promise was not to the Jews only nor exclusively for the Jews, but rather extends ultimately to all who are faithful to God and ultimately the work of the Messiah, a descendant of Abraham. The word *blessed* implies moral, spiritual, and eternal good rather than material and temporal good. Paul writes, "*So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham*" (Gal. 3:9).

In fulfilling these three great promises, the *special providence* of God is seen in the statements: (1) "*And I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing*" (Gen. 12:2). Abraham was blessed by God both spiritually and materially. (2) "*I will bless them that bless thee*" (Gen. 12:3). Israel's history is replete of God's blessings upon those who were good and kind both to Abraham and his descendants. (3) "*I will curse him that curseth thee*" (Gen. 12:3). God's wrath was poured out on many individuals and nations who opposed the Israelites.

The question arises, "*With Abraham both childless and aged, how will all of this occur so that not only Abraham and his descendants are blessed, but all the families of the earth?*" It cannot be explained apart from (1) obedient faith of Abraham and his descendants from the human side and (2) the *special providence* of God from the divine side.

First, God's promises to Abraham were *conditional*. A careful examination of the Biblical record shows that God set forth in clear terms the *conditions* of these

promises. Abraham was to “walk before me [God] and be thou perfect” (Gen. 17:1). Had Abraham not willingly and obediently left his “country” and “kindred” (Gen. 12:1, 4), “arisen” and “walked through the land” (Gen. 13:17), “looked toward heaven” (Gen. 15:5), and “walked before” God righteously (Gen. 17:1), Abraham could not have kept the covenant God made with him and the promises would never have been realized. The verbs of action — *get, arise, walk, look, and keep* — are indicative of the *conditions* which Abraham must meet to enjoy the blessings and *special providence* of God. Thus, Paul would describe Abraham’s actions as: “By faith, Abraham ... obeyed ... “ (Heb. 11:8).

The Biblical catalog describing Abraham as “a man of faith” is interesting and enlightening. In the Old Testament, Abraham is: (1) “the father of a multitude” (Gen. 17:5); (2) “a prophet” (Gen. 20:7), (3) “a mighty prince” (Gen. 23:6), (4) God’s “friend forever” (II Chron. 20:7; Isa. 41:8), and (5) God’s “servant” (Psm. 105:6). In the New Testament, Abraham is known as: (1) “the friend of God” (James 2:23), (2) “the father of all them that believe” (Rom. 4:11), (3) “the father of us all” (Rom. 4:16), (4) “the father of many nations” (Rom. 4:18), (5) a man of obedient faith (Heb. 11:8-10, 17-19), and (6) one who “died in the faith” (Heb. 11:13).

Second, God’s promise to Abraham involves more than just material blessings of a land and a great nation. They involve the **Scheme of Redemption**. This involves God’s *providence* — His love, care, concern, protection, provision, and working out the Scheme of Redemption.

In fulfilling both the material and the spiritual aspect of His covenant with Abraham, an offspring of heir is required. Abraham realized this and asked God an important question concerning these promises:

Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house

is mine heir. (Gen. 15:2-3).

In other words, *how* will your promises of being a father of a great nation and my blessing all the families of the earth be realized? God knew Abraham was a man of faith and that he would “*command his children and his household after him*” that they would keep “*the way of the Lord that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him*” (Gen. 18:19).

God replied that the seed or heir would not come (1) through his servant, Eliezer, (Gen. 15:4), nor (2) of Ishmael born of Sarah’s handmaid, Hagar (Gen. 16), but “*he that shall come out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir*” (Gen. 15:4). The promised heir or seed was his son Isaac by his barren wife, Sarah.

Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac; and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him (Gen. 17:19,21).

God’s *special providence* is seen in providing, caring and blessing Abraham with Isaac. It was *all* according to God’s will. The promise of an heir is fulfilled:

And the Lord visited Sarah as he has said, and the Lord did unto Sarah as he had spoken, For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him, And Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bare to him, Isaac (Gen. 21:1-3; cf. Heb. 11:17-19).

In working out His Scheme of Redemption, God continues His divine guidance by renewing His covenant, originally made with Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3), with (1) Isaac (Gen. 26:13-14) and (2) Jacob (Gen. 28:13-14; 35:11-12). Isaac was blessed with Jacob from whom the nation of Israel was descended.

God’s *divine providence* with Israel is seen in His

continual working with individuals and the nation. It was the *divine providence* of God that enabled Israel to develop into a great nation in Egypt under friendly rulers (Gen. 39:5), but who later delivered them when they came into bondage (Gen. 15:13-15; Exod. 2:24; Deut. 7:7-8). It was God's *divine providence* that guided, cared for, and enabled Israel to be victorious in both the wilderness wandering and the conquest of the land of Canaan. God's love, care and concern remained with Israel when she turned to sin and forsook Him. But, *all* of God's actions were designed to bring about God's Scheme of Redemption for all mankind through Christ.

God's *special providence* is seen in His promise to David that after his death, He would,

set up thy seed after thee which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom, He shall build an house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son (II Sam. 7:12-14).

God's *divine providence* is seen in His protection of Jerusalem when besieged by Sennacherib (Isa. 36, 37) while allowing the northern kingdom to be "*trodden under*" (Isa. 28:3) by a common enemy. God's willingness to punish Judah with seventy years of captivity, because of her many sins (Isa. 48:1-11), instead of extinction (Isa. 48:9), shows His *special providence* to bring about His promise to Abraham of blessing all the families of the earth. As Israel returned from exile in Babylon, it was God's care and *special providence* that sustained them (Isa. 43:19; 48:21-22; Ezra 8:21-23; Psm. 137:1-4).

Paul states,

Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many, but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ (Gal. 3:16).

Christ as "*the seed*" and Redeemer of man is the apex and culmination of God's work in making the Scheme of

Redemption a reality. The *providence* of God is seen mightily in the birth, life and ministry of Christ.

But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons (Gal. 4:4-5).

Christ was born of a virgin woman as prophesied by Isaiah (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:22-23) during the closing days as the Law of Moses was waxing old and vanishing away (Heb. 8:13). During His birth and throughout His subsequent ministry, God's *special providence* was with Him. This special care, concern, and provision for the promised seed and Redeemer is prophesied in Isaiah 50:7-9 and a careful study of the life and ministry of Christ verifies its fulfillment.

The work of Christ fulfills the promise God made to Abraham to bless all the families of the earth. The Great Commission was to (1) "*all nations*" (Matt. 28:19; Luke 24:47), (2) "*the world ... every creature*" (Mark 16:15), and (3) "*the uttermost part of the earth*" (Acts 1:8). Paul states,

...and if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and his heirs according to the promise (Gal. 3:29).

John gives clear evidence of His success by stating that Christ:

...hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation (Rev. 5:9).

Spiritual Israel, the church/kingdom, is blessed with God's *special providence* while upon earth until we are taken to heaven (I Cor. 15:24). As she is faithful to Christ, her head (Col. 1:18; II John 9-11), she enjoys God's presence (Matt. 28:20; Eph. 2:21-22), she is never forsaken by the Lord (Heb. 13:5), enjoys a mutual fellowship (I John 1:3, 6), has all spiritual blessings (Eph.

1:3), has a permanent and eternal divine standard by which to live and worship God (II Tim. 3:16-17; Acts 20:32), and has a love and peace that surpasses all knowledge and understanding (Eph. 3:19; Phil. 4:7). What care, concern, love, and divine direction!

The Bible clearly shows God has *providentially* worked to make the Scheme of Redemption a blessing by culminating the promises made to Abraham with the Redeemer and Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ!

II. The Relationship Between Faith And Providence

It is important to understand the relationship between God's providence and man's faith. Controversy abounds in the religious world concerning the Biblical doctrine of God's saving grace and faith.

God's part in the redemption of man is described as *grace*.

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast (Eph. 2:8-9).

Certainly, God's grace by which redemption is offered to man involves God's providence — His care, concern, and provision. In the above section we have clearly shown how God's providence was developed in the promises made to Abraham and which culminated in blessing all the families of the earth through Christ. The salvation offered to man (Rom. 1:16) is by grace through obedient faith. God's "*eternal purpose*" (Eph. 3:11) developed among men was by God's providence and desire that all men be "*justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*" (Rom. 3:24).

Man's part in appropriating God's grace and being a recipient of God's benevolent providence is described as "*by faith*" (Rom. 3:24-28). The phrase "*by faith*"

means *“obedient faith”* as seen above. It was Abraham’s *“obedient faith”* that was counted to him for righteousness (Gen. 15:6), that is, Abraham’s faith was expressed in the actions which God demanded in order for him to receive God’s promises. He left Ur of the Chaldees (Gen. 12:1) which Paul describes as:

By faith Abraham ... obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went (Heb. 11:8).

God commanded Abraham to

...walk before me, and be thou perfect (Gen. 17:1).

Abraham’s obedient faith is demonstrated in his offering of Isaac on Moriah (Gen. 22). His righteousness was expressed by obedient faith. He complied with God’s commands. Paul describes his actions as:

By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure (Heb. 11:17-19)

Abraham’s faith was an expression of his complete trust in God and obedience to His will.

Was not Abraham our father justified by works ... and by works was faith (Abraham’s) made perfect (James 2:21-22).

Abraham’s obedient faith to God’s will provided for him God’s providential care. It is the obedient faith of Abraham that serves as an example of all who would be recipients of God’s grace and providence (cf. Rom. 4:9-12).

Faith is described by Thayer as *“a conviction, full of joyful trust ... conjoined with obedience to Christ.”*³It is

obedient faith by which we are saved (Rom. 5:1; I Peter 4:17; II Thess. 1:8-9). The alien sinner does not stagger at God's plan of redemption but will manifest his faith in God (Heb. 11:6; 1), repent of his sins (Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; 3:19), and be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16). His life then is one of commitment to God and His word by being faithful unto death (Rev. 2:10). His life of commitment is filled with hope for the city which hath foundations and whose builder and maker is God (Heb. 11:10).

Paul describes Abraham's faith as that which "*staggered not.*"

He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform (Rom. 4:20-21).

His obedient faith was a life of faith and trust being fully persuaded of God's promise.

As Abraham we are to be "*fully persuaded*" so as to live a life of obedient faith which works by love (Gal. 5:6). To love God is to keep His commandments which are not grievous (John 14:15; I John 5:3). Our faith lives and abides in the teaching of God as found in the Bible (II Tim. 3:16-17) which enables us to know the truth and be free (John 8:32) and to be sanctified from the world (John 17:17). This calls for a living, obedient faith and not doing what God has not authorized us to do (Rom. 15:4; II John 9-11). To reason one is saved by "*faith alone*" or "*faith only*" is to reason falsely.

Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone ... ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only (James 2:17, 24).

If we live faithful in Christ, "*then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise*" (Gal. 3:29). Only then are we recipients of His grace and providence.

Endnotes

1 **Theological Dictionary of the New Testament**, IV. 1009-1010.

2 "*The Providence of God*," J. Noel Merideth, **Christian Light**, March, 1987, p. 2.

3 **Greek-English Lexicon**, p. 54.

Chapter 7

What Do The Lives Of Jacob And Esau Teach About The Providence Of God?

Dave Miller

The historical narratives of the Old Testament supply rich and sumptuous insight into spiritual living (Rom. 15:4; I Cor. 10:11; II Tim. 3:16-17). Particularly prominent in Hebrew history is the providence of God, seen most vividly in His overarching, behind-the-scenes treatment of ordinary, everyday people.

The bulk of the events of the lives of Jacob and Esau are related to us by Moses in Genesis 25, 27-35. I urge you to study carefully these chapters before giving consideration to the following chart:

<u>Sinful Behavior</u>	<u>Righteous Behavior</u>	<u>God's Input</u>
1. Parental partiality (25:28)	1. Isaac's belief in God's promises (28:3-4; cf. Heb. 11:20)	1. Birth prophecy (25:23)
2. Esau's "profane" conduct (25:31-34; cf. Heb. 12:16-17)	2. Jacob's vow (28:20-22)	2. Jacob's dream (28:12-15)
3. Jacob's taking advantage (25:31, 33; 27:36)	3. Jacob's belief in God's care (30:30; 31:7-9, 42; 33:11)	3. Altered barrenness (29:31; 30:17, 22)

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| 4. Rebekeh's
deceit
(27:6-17) | 4. Rachel/Leah's
belief in God's
direction (31:16) | 4. Tells Jacob
return to
Canaan
(31:3, 13) |
| 5. Jacob's
deceit & lies
(27:18-19) | 5. Jacob's
prayer
(32:9-12) | 5. Jacob's
dream
(31:10-13) |
| 6. Rachel's
theft
(31:19) | 6. Esau's forgiving
attitude
(33:4) | 6. Laban's
dream
(31:24) |
| 7. Esau's
thoughts
of murder
(27:41) | 7. Jacob sets
up altar
(33:20) | 7. Jacob
wrestles
(32:22-32) |
| 8. Laban's
deceit
(29:23-25) | 8. Jacob sets up
altar/pillar at
Bethel
(35:2-7, 14) | 8. Jacob sent
to Bethel &
protected
(35:1, 5) |
| 9. Jacob's
polygamy
(29:28-30;
30:4, 9) | | 9. Jacob
blessed &
renamed
(35:9-12) |
| 10. Laban's cheating
(31:7, 41) | | |
| 11. Dinah raped/
murderous
retaliation (34) | | |
| 12. Reuben's incest
(35:22) | | |

Providential Considerations

Several significant observations emerge from the Biblical data pertaining to Jacob and Esau which assist us in grasping the nature of the providence of God:

(1) Jacob and Esau were not sinless individuals. They were mere men who made mistakes and came into

conflict with the will of God. Wherein these men fit into the higher purposes of God, they did so in spite of their imperfections and lapses into disobedience. Often, the inspired writer, Moses, did not comment on the goodness or wickedness of an action. We must not assume that perhaps God did not consider their behavior sinful or that He sanctioned an act simply because no expression of divine displeasure is mentioned. God was going to work out His purposes as they related to the fleshly descendants of Abraham regardless of how disobedient some individuals became.

Jacob was one link in God's providential chain of redemption. The promises which were made to Abraham were being gradually moved down the road to fruition. Those promises would be fulfilled regardless of the inadequacies and weaknesses of Abraham's posterity. God is able to use individuals, with all of their wicked and/or righteous actions, and bring about His ultimate designs.

The only limitation to which God had committed Himself at this stage of His grand scheme of redemption was that the promises made to Abraham were to be accomplished through Abraham's seed (Gen. 12:1-3). Abraham had been singled out because of his obedient trust (Gen. 26:1-5; cf., Heb. 11:8-19). God would not have had to place even this restriction upon Himself (Deut. 4:37; 7:7-8). Of course, *someone* had to be selected through whom He could work out His will.

Once Abraham had been singled out, God was still free to operate through any of his descendants. It so happened that He chose to carry out His purpose through the Isaac-Jacob lineage.¹ Yet even after restricting Himself by narrowing the range of viable candidates to Jacob's sons, He was not limited as to which tribe or family clan He might wish to use (cf., Exod. 32:10).

(2) We must not confuse the physical blessings associated with the Abrahamic promise and the spiritual blessings which are afforded everyone because Christ

came. Nor must we forget that even the spiritual blessings available to all humans who have ever lived or will live are offered on a personal, individual basis to those who respond obediently to whatever divine stipulations are applicable to them.

The national and land promises were made only to physical descendants of Abraham. These promises pertained to *this life* and were conditional (e.g., Deut. 4:25-27; Josh. 23:14-16; I Kings 9:3-7; Jer. 18:7-11). Notice that these physical blessings did not guarantee what has always been based upon individual obedience to the commands of God.

The spiritual promise made to Abraham referred to the advent of Jesus (Gal. 3:16, 29). A physical Jew received no personal spiritual blessing simply because Jesus was a physical Jew. A Jew would have to trust and obey in order to benefit from Christ's propitiatory function. Jacob was singled out by God even before he was born to be a physical ancestor of Christ (Rom. 9:11). Yet, Jacob's spiritual standing in eternity will be based upon his own personal faithfulness to the revealed will of God.

(3) As we observe that Jacob and his contemporaries made mistakes and committed sin in God's sight, we must also recognize that people can repent, grow, mature, and strive to live more faithfully. A person can sin, as did Jacob, yet still acknowledge the presence and will of God in his life and endeavor to do better. In his younger years, Jacob clearly violated fundamental Biblical principles which were operative from the beginning of time. Yet, evidence exists that he grew and became stronger in his commitment to the will of God. The discipline and stability that comes from enduring life's hardships no doubt were developed in his character (31:40). The middle column of the above chart suggests a gradual progression toward increased dependence upon God in his life.

Jacob, himself, admitted nearer the end of his life that his life had experienced much unhappiness (Gen.

47:9). He reaped the consequences of his own sins (Gal. 6:7). Just as he had been a deceiver, so he was deceived (29:25). *“Be sure your sins will find you out”* (Num. 32:23). Rebekah’s deceit was repaid with the repulsion from her presence of her favorite son for at least twenty years — and she may have never seen him again (31:41).

(4) Notice that the third column in the chart above identifies God’s intervention into the lives of Jacob and his contemporaries in a miraculous way. Strictly speaking, these nine instances do not involve the *“providence”* of God. God’s providence is seen in their lives in non-miraculous, less direct ways. God used Jacob (and the twelve sons that came from his own body) to bring into existence a nation that would function in specific ways in order to accomplish His redemptive schemes (Rom. 9:4-5; cf., Rom. 3:2). God’s providence is thus seen in the fact that while each of the figures acted of their own free will in their daily lives, God was able to use them to bring about broader, more long range purposes.

What Might We Learn From These Events About The Providence Of God?

(1) Surely we can see that any one of us can benefit from God’s benevolent care, even though we are imperfect people. He is kind even to the evil and unthankful (Luke 6:35). We must not give up, or slump into a deliberate lifestyle of sin. We ought to recognize our weaknesses and learn from our mistakes.

(2) If we will strive to live faithfully and loyally before God, He will take care of us and see us through the hardships, afflictions, and suffering which this life inevitably brings (Rom. 8:28). Though we are threatened by ominous forces and taunted by evil surroundings, we must learn to look beyond the immediate and momentary to the broader picture. Somewhere, somehow behind it all, God is operating to bring His purposes to fruition. Eternity is the target and submission to the will of God is the means by which we may impel our souls

into eternity in good shape.

(3) God is the Architect of the universe and the Grand Designer of human history. He still *“rules in the kingdom of men”* (Dan. 4:17, 25, 32). We are privileged to live in a period of human history in which the ultimate blessings of God have been made available — something which the prophets and even angels anxiously yearned to observe (I Pet. 1:10-12). How blessed we are that even the patriarchs, whom God incorporated into His divine designs, *“without us should not be made perfect”* (Heb. 11:40)! We, therefore, ought to bow humbly before the gracious Father in trusting acquiescence, committing our very beings to the written guidelines with which He has supplied us. In light of His marvelous providence, we ought to face each new day with the very words of Jesus on our lips: *“not my will, but thine, be done”* (Luke 22:42; cf., James 4:15).

Conclusion

By the end of his life, Jacob had become the tempered, sturdy soul that God wants us all to become. At the age of 147, he called his long lost, beloved son Joseph into his presence. He made Joseph promise to bury him — not in Egypt where they were then residing — but in Canaan. Jacob was fully convinced that God would one day give his descendants that land and that’s where he wanted to be buried. Leaning on the top of his staff, he then bowed his head in worship to God (Gen. 47:29-31; cf., Heb. 11:21). May our faith in God and our trust in His providential dealings be as vibrant as was this patriarch of old.

Endnote

1 See J. W. McGarvey’s discussion of this matter in his **Commentary on Thessalonians, Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans** (Delight, AR: Gospel Light Publishing Co., n.d.), pp. 383-393.

Chapter 8

What Does The Life Of Joseph Teach About The Providence Of God?

Roy Deaver

We Are Introduced To Joseph

Isaac, the son which God had promised to Abraham and Sarah, at age forty had married Rebekah. Rebekah was barren, *“And Isaac intreated the Lord for his wife...and the Lord was intreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived”* (Gen. 25:21). *“And when her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold there were twins in her womb”* (Gen. 25:24). The twins, Jacob and Esau, were born. Esau was born first. *“Isaac was threescore years old when she bare them”* (Gen. 25:26).

When Isaac was old and his eyes were dim so that he could not see, he desired to pronounce the patriarchal blessing upon Esau – this in spite of God’s plain declaration recorded in Gen. 25:23. Rebekah heard Isaac talking with Esau about the blessing, and she was determined that the special blessing would go to Jacob. Jacob joined his mother in a conspiracy designed to cause Isaac to pronounce the blessing upon Jacob. The conspiracy was successful, and Isaac blessed Jacob.

And Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing wherewith his father had blessed him: and Esau said in his heart, The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob.

Isaac and Rebekah sent Jacob away, to the land of

Padan-aram, to the house of Bethuel the mother of Rebekah, to take a wife from the daughters of Laban, Rebekah's brother.

Thus it was that Jacob came to the house of Laban, where he remained for at least twenty years. Laban had two daughters – Leah and Rachel. “*Jacob loved Rachel*” and bargained to work for Laban for seven years that he might have Rachel as his wife. These years “...seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her” (Gen. 29:20). Uncle Laban deceived Jacob, and Jacob was given Leah instead of Rachel. Leah was given the handmaid Zilpah. Jacob said to Laban: “*What is this thou has done unto me? did not I serve with thee for Rachel? wherefore then hast thou beguiled me?*” (Gen. 29:25). Jacob bargained to work for Laban another seven years, that he might have Rachel. Jacob received Rachel at the end of one week, but continued to work for Laban for the additional seven years. To Rachel was given the handmaid Bilhah.

To Jacob and Leah were born: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, and Dinah (the only daughter). To Jacob and Bilhah were born Dan and Naphtali. To Jacob and Zilpah were born Gad and Asher. To Jacob and Rachel were born Joseph and Benjamin. Through Jacob, we are thus introduced to the twelve sons, who in time would become the heads of the twelve tribes which would constitute the nation of Israel – as God had promised to Abraham. Also, through Jacob we are introduced in a very special way to Joseph, who had a tremendously important role in the development of God's Scheme of Redemption. Gen. 37 through 50 is the Sacred Story of Joseph – the preservation of an embryonic nation.

The Hatred

Jacob dwelt in the land of Canaan. When Joseph was seventeen years old he was tending the flock of his father, working with his brothers – the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah. It was in all probability Joseph's

responsibility to report to his father, and the record says that *“Joseph brought unto his father their evil report.”* Jacob loved Joseph more than he loved the other children. This special love would be occasioned by three factors: (1) Joseph’s own goodness of character, (2) the fact that he was the son of Rachel, and (3) the fact that he was the son of Jacob’s old age – Jacob was 91 years old when Joseph was born. Related to this special love, Jacob made for Joseph a *“coat of many colours.”* It was a long garment with sleeves. It was something very special, and most likely was intended to indicate that it was Jacob’s plan for Joseph to become the future leader of the family. But, this love and this garment simply aggravated the brothers and increased their hatred. They could not speak peaceably to him.

Too, Joseph was the dreamer. Joseph dreamed that he and his brothers were binding sheaves in the field, and his sheaf arose and stood up while their sheaves made obeisance to his sheaf. The brothers said: *“Shalt thou indeed reign over us? or shalt thou indeed have dominion over us?”* *“And they hated him yet the more for his dreams, and for his words.”* Joseph dreamed another dream, and he told it to his brothers. He dreamed that the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to him. He told the dream to his father also. His father rebuked him, and said: *“Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down to thee to the earth?”* His brothers became enraged with hatred.

The Sale

The brothers went to feed the father’s flock in Shechem. Jacob instructed Joseph: *“Do not thy brethren feed the flock in Shechem? come, and I will send thee unto them.”* Jacob said: *“Go, I pray thee, see whether it be well with thy brethren, and well with the flocks; and bring me word again.”* Jacob sent Joseph from Hebron, and Joseph came to Shechem.

But, the brothers were not in Shechem, and Joseph

“was wandering in the field.” A man asked Joseph: *“What seekest thou?”* Joseph said: *“I seek my brethren: tell me, I pray thee, where they feed their flocks.”* The man said: *“They are departed hence; for I heard them say, Let us go to Dothan.”* And Joseph went after his brethren, and found them in Dothan.

The brothers must have been away from home for some time – long enough for Jacob to want to know about them and about the flocks. Joseph must have thought that

Surely , in spite of their hatred for me, they will be glad to see me, and they will be anxious to have some word about Dad and about home.

But how disappointed Joseph must have been! Even when Joseph was still *“afar off”* the brothers conspired against him. They made plans to kill him. They said:

Behold , this dreamer cometh. Come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him: and we shall see what will become of his dreams.

Reuben, who apparently was away when the conspiracy was being planned, heard about the plans. Reuben said: *“Let us not kill him...Shed no blood, but cast him into this pit that is in the wilderness, and lay no hand upon him.”* Reuben intended to come back later, take Joseph out of the pit, and send him back to his father.

When Joseph *“...was come to his brethren, they stript Joseph out of his coat, his coat of many colours that was upon him; And they took him, and cast him into a pit: and the pit was empty, there was no water in it.”* While the brothers were eating, they *“lifted up their eyes”* and they saw coming toward them a company of Ishmaelites, with their camels bearing spicery and balm and myrrh, going to carry it down to Egypt. Judah said to his brothers:

What profit is it if we slay our brother, and conceal his

blood? Come, and let us sell him to the Ismaelites, and let not our hand be upon him; for he is our brother and our flesh.

Judah's brethren *"hearkened unto him."* The Ishmaelites – the Midianites merchantmen – passed by. The brothers *"...drew and lifted Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver."* The Ishmaelites took Joseph into Egypt. The Ishmaelites sold Joseph *"...into Egypt unto Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh's, and captain of the guard."*

The Big Lie

Reuben was away when the sale took place. When he returned, as he had planned, for the purpose of taking Joseph out of the pit, and when he discovered that *"Joseph was not in the pit"* he *"rent his clothes."* He returned to his brothers and said to them: *"The child is not; and I, whither shall I go?"* Then the brothers

...took Joseph's coat, and killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the coat in the blood; and they sent the coat of many colours, and they brought it to their father; and said, This we have found: know now whether it be thy son's coat or no.

Jacob *"...knew it, and said, It is my son's coat; an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces."* Jacob *"...rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days."* The Record says:

And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; and he refused to be comforted; and he said, For I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning. Thus his father wept for him.

Another Big Lie

Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought Joseph from the Ishmaelites.

“And the Lord was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian.” Joseph’s master saw that the Lord was with Joseph, and that the Lord had made all that he did to prosper in his hand. *“And Joseph found grace in His sight, and he served Him.”* Potiphar made Joseph overseer over his house, and *“all that he had he put into his hand.”* God abundantly blessed Potiphar for Joseph’s sake: *“...and the blessing of the Lord was upon all that he had in the house, and in the field”* (Gen. 39:5). Potiphar entrusted all that he had to Joseph.

“And Joseph was a goodly person, and well favoured.” *“It came to pass”* that Potiphar’s wife *“cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, Lie with me.”* *“But Joseph refused.”* Joseph said to his master’s wife:

Behold, my master knoweth not what is with me in the house, and he hath committed all that he hath to my hand; There is none greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back anything from me but thee, because thou art his wife: how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?

This sinful woman continued her efforts to entice Joseph. She continued her pleas *“day by day.”* And, Joseph continued to refuse to be led into sin. Upon one occasion – a very opportune time from her viewpoint – she sought again to entice Joseph. Joseph had come into the house *“to do his business”* (Gen. 39:11). There was no one else in the house. *“And she caught him by his garment, saying, Lie with me: and he left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got him out.”* When she realized that Joseph had left his garment and was fled forth, she called the men of her house, and spake unto them, saying:

See, he hath brought an Hebrew unto us to mock us; he came in unto me to lie with me, and I cried with a loud voice: And it came to pass, when he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried, that he left his

garment with me, and fled, and got him out.

And *“she laid up his garment by her,”* waiting for her husband to come home. She said to her husband: *“The Hebrew servant, which thou hast brought unto us, came in unto me to mock me: And it came to pass, as I lifted up my voice and cried, that he left his garment with me, and fled out.”* When Potiphar heard these words of his wife *“...his wrath was kindled.”* The Record says: *“And Joseph’s master took him, and put him into the prison, a place where the king’s prisoners were bound: and he was there in prison.”* Question: Why did Potiphar not have Joseph put to death? Why did he simply have Joseph put in prison? Why did he have Joseph put in the special prison for the king’s prisoners? Is it possible that Potiphar had more confidence in Joseph than he had in his wife?

The Interpreter

But the Lord was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison. And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph’s hand all the prisoners that were in the prison; and whatsoever they did, he was the doer of it. The keeper of the prison looked not to any thing that was under his hand; because the Lord was with him, and that which he did, the Lord made to prosper (Gen. 39:21-23).

The king’s butler and baker had offended their king. These offenders were the chief of the butlers and the chief of the bakers. Pharaoh was wroth against these, and he had them put in prison—in the prison of the captain of the guard, into the very place where Joseph was bound. The butler and the baker were placed in Joseph’s charge.

One night—the same night—both the butler and the baker dreamed dreams. When Joseph came into their presence in the morning, he noticed that they were sad. Joseph asked them: *“Wherefore look ye so sadly to day?”* They said: *“We have dreamed a dream, and there*

is no interpreter of it.” Joseph said to them: *“Do not interpretations belong to God? tell me them, I pray you.”* The chief butler told his dream. There was a vine before him, in which there were three branches. There were buds and blossoms and then clusters of ripe grapes. Pharaoh’s cup was in the hand of the butler, and he took the grapes, pressed them into Pharaoh’s cup, and placed the cup into the hand of Pharaoh. Joseph said:

The three branches are three days: Yet within three days shall Pharaoh lift up thine head, and restore thee unto thy place: and thou shalt deliver Pharaoh’s cup into his hand, after the former manner when thou wast his butler.

Joseph said to the chief butler:

But think on me when it shall be well with thee, and show kindness, I pray thee, upon me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house: For indeed I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews: and here also have I done nothing that they shall put me into the dungeon.

When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was good, he revealed his dream. There were three white baskets upon his head. In the uppermost basket there was all manner of bakemeats for Pharaoh, and the birds did eat them out of the basket. Joseph said:

The three baskets are three days. Yet within three days shall Pharaoh lift up thy head off thee, and shall hang thee on a tree; and the birds shall eat thy flesh from off thee.

After three days, on Pharaoh’s birthday, the butler was restored to his butlership again, and the chief baker was hanged. It is specifically noted that *“Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him.”*

From Prisoner To Prime Minister

Two full years went by. Pharaoh himself dreamed dreams. In the first dream he stood by the river, and there came up out of the river seven well favoured cows, fatfleshed; and they fed in a meadow. Then, seven other ill favoured and leanfleshed cows came up out of the river, and stood by the other cows. The ill favoured and leanfleshed cows devoured the well favoured and fatfleshed cows. Pharaoh awoke. He slept again, and he had another dream. This time, seven ears of corn came up on one stalk—fat ears and good. Then, seven thin ears—blasted with the east wind—came up. The seven thin ears devoured the seven good ears. Pharaoh awoke.

In the morning, Pharaoh was troubled. He sent for his magicians, and all the wise men of Egypt. Pharaoh told them his dreams; but there was none that could interpret the dreams. The butler remembered! He spoke to Pharaoh, saying:

I do remember my faults this day: Pharaoh was wroth with his servants, and put me in ward in the captain of the guard's house, both me and the chief baker: And we dreamed a dream in one night, I and he; we dreamed each man according to the interpretation of his dream. And there was there with us a young man, an Hebrew, servant to the captain of the guard; and we told him, and he interpreted to us our dreams; to each man according to his dream he did interpret. And it came to pass, as he interpreted to us, so it was; me he restored unto mine office, and him he hanged.

Pharaoh sent and called for Joseph. They brought him hastily out of the dungeon. He shaved himself, and changed his clothes, and appeared before Pharaoh. Pharaoh explained to Joseph about his dreams, and said:

There is none that can interpret: and I have heard say of thee, that thou canst understand a dream and interpret it.

Joseph said to Pharaoh:

It is not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace.

Pharaoh went over the dream point by point. And Joseph said unto Pharaoh:

The dream is one: God hath shewed Pharaoh what he is about to do. The seven good kine are seven years; and the seven good ears are seven years: the dream is one. And the seven thin and ill favoured kine that came up after them are seven years; and the seven empty ears blasted with the east wind shall be seven years of famine. This is the thing which I have spoken unto Pharaoh: What God is about to do he sheweth unto Pharaoh. Behold, there come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt. And there shall arise after them seven years of famine; and all the plenty shall be forgotten in the land of Egypt; and the famine shall consume the land; And the plenty shall not be known in the land by reason of that famine following; for it shall be very grievous. And for that the dream was doubled unto Pharaoh twice; it is because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass.

Joseph continued:

Now therefore, let Pharaoh look out a man discreet and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh do this, and let him appoint officers over the land, and take up the fifth part of the land of Egypt in the seven plenteous years. And let them gather all the food of those good years that come, and lay up corn under the hand of Pharaoh, and let them keep food in the cities. And that food shall be for store to the land against the seven years of famine, which shall be in the land of Egypt; that the land perish not through the famine.

The record then states:

And the thing was good in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of all his servants. And Pharaoh said unto

his servants, Can we find such a one as this is, a man in whom the Spirit of God is? And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as God hath shewed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art: Thou shalt be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than thou. And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, See, I have set thee over all the land of Egypt. And Pharaoh took off his ring from his hand, and put it upon Joseph's hand, and arrayed him in vestures of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck; And he made him to ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried before him, Bow the knee: and he made him ruler over all the land of Egypt.

Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went throughout all the land of Egypt.

The Brothers' First Trip To Egypt

Pharaoh gave Joseph for his wife Asenath, the daughter of Potipherah, priest of On. The seven plentiful years came, and were wonderful indeed. Joseph gathered corn as the sand of the sea, very much, until he left numbering, and placed it in storage. Unto Joseph were born two sons before the years of famine came. Joseph called the name of the firstborn *Manasseh*: "*For God,*" said he, "*hath made me to forget all my toil, and my father's house.*" He called the name of the second son, *Ephraim*: "*For God,*" said he, "*hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction.*" The seven years of plenty came to an end (exactly as God had said), and the seven years of famine began. The dearth was in all the lands; but in all the land of Egypt there was bread. The famine was over all the face of the earth: and Joseph opened all the storehouses. And all countries came into Egypt to Joseph to buy corn.

There was famine in Canaan. Jacob knew that there was corn in Egypt. Jacob instructed his sons to go down

to Egypt *"and buy for us ... that we may live, and not die."* Joseph's ten brethren went down to buy corn in Egypt. But, let it be noted that *Benjamin*, Joseph's full brother, did not go. Jacob said, *"Lest peradventure mischief befall him."* So, the sons of Jacob came to buy corn from Egypt, for there was famine in the land of Canaan.

And Joseph was the governor over the land, and he it was that sold to all the people of the land: and Joseph's brethren came, and bowed down themselves before him with their faces to the earth.

Joseph saw his brothers, and recognized them; but he made himself strange unto them, and spake roughly unto them. Joseph said to them: *"Whence come ye?"* They said: *"From the land of Canaan to buy food."*

May we pause here to mention that just as soon as Joseph saw his brethren, he began (in his own mind) to devise a plan by which (if successful) he would be able (1) to get rid of these brethren—the ones who had hated him and who had sold him, and at the same time (2) to have Benjamin brought to Egypt that he (Joseph) might see him. Remember: Benjamin was Joseph's full brother, and—further—Benjamin had had no part in the selling of Joseph. Joseph so desperately wanted to see Benjamin.

Joseph began to execute the plan. Joseph's brothers did not recognize Joseph. He was likely dressed in Egyptian garb, and spake through an interpreter. Joseph said: *"Ye are spies; to see the nakedness of the land ye are come."* They said: *"Nay, my lord, but to buy food are thy servants come."* They continued: *"We are all one man's sons; we are true men, thy servants are no spies."* Joseph said: *"Nay, but to see the nakedness of the land ye are come."* They said: *"Thy servants are twelve brethren, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is not."* Joseph must have been delighted especially when reference was made to his younger brother. Joseph continued: *"That it is that I spake unto you,*

saying, Ye are spies. Hereby ye shall be proved: By the life of Pharaoh ye shall not go forth hence, except your youngest brother come hither." Joseph said: *"Send one of you, and let him fetch your brother, and ye shall be kept in prison, that your words may be proved, whether there be any truth in you: or else by the life of Pharaoh surely ye are spies."* Joseph put them ALL together in prison, three days.

On the third day, Joseph said to these men: *"This do, and live; for I fear God: If ye be true men, let one of your brethren be bound in the house of your prison: go ye, carry corn for the famine of your houses: But bring your youngest brother unto me; so shall your words be verified, and ye shall not die."* The brothers began to talk among themselves, not realizing that Joseph could hear and understand what they were saying. They said one to another, *"We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us."* What a revelation this was to Joseph. These men—who had hated him so much, who had persecuted him so terribly, and who had sold him into slavery—are now confessing their sins and recognizing their guilt! Reuben spoke. He said: *"Spake I not unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child; and ye would not hear? therefore, behold, also, his blood is required."* What a revelation to Joseph! Now, he knows that REUBEN DID NOT HAVE PART in the sale, but rather tried to keep the others from going through with their terrible and sinful plans. The main reason they did not know that Joseph was understanding what they were saying was the fact that Joseph was speaking to them through an interpreter. When Joseph heard these men confess their sins, and recognize their guilt, and when he heard the statements from Reuben, *"...he turned himself about from them, and wept."* Joseph returned to them, and communed with them, and took Simeon, and bound him before their eyes. Simeon is to be held hostage

while the others return home. Reuben is the oldest of the sons. Why did Joseph pass over Reuben and take Simeon, the next to the oldest? Likely because he had learned that Reuben had nothing to do with the sale.

Joseph would test these men—his brothers. He commanded that their sacks be filled with corn, and that every man's money (the purchase price) be put back into his sack. Joseph also commanded that provisions be given to the men for their trip back home. What did Joseph have in mind? If these were the same men (in character) which he had known, he would never see this money again! It was a very important test.

At feeding time, one of the men opened his sack and he saw the money in the sack—in the sack's mouth. He said to his brothers: *"My money is restored; it is even in my sack."* And their hearts failed them, and they were afraid, saying one to another: *"What is this that God hath done to us?"*

They came to Jacob their father, in the land of Canaan. They told Jacob all that had happened. They said: *"The man, who is the lord of the land, spake roughly to us, and took us for spies of the country. And we said unto him, We are true men; we are no spies: We be twelve brethren, sons of our father; one is not, and the youngest is this day with our father in the land of Canaan. And the man, the lord of the country, said unto us, Hereby shall I know that ye are true men; leave one of your brethren here with me, and take food for the famine of your households, and be gone: and bring your youngest brother unto me: then shall I know that ye are no spies, but that ye are true men: so will I deliver you your brother, and ye shall traffick in the land."*

"And it came to pass as they emptied their sacks, that, behold, every man's bundle of money was in his sack: and when they and their father saw the bundles of money, they were afraid." And Jacob said unto them: *"Me have ye bereaved of my children: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these*

things are against me.” Reuben said unto his father: “Slay my two sons, if I bring him not to thee: deliver him into my hands, and I will bring him to thee again.” Jacob said: “My son shall not go down with you; for his brother is dead, and he is left alone: if mischief befall him by the way in which ye go, then shall ye bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave.”

The Brothers’ Second Trip To Egypt

When the corn was gone (which they had brought out of Egypt) Jacob said to his sons: *“Go again, buy us a little food.”* Judah said: *“The man did solemnly protest unto us, saying, Ye shall not see my face, except your brother be with you. If thou wilt send our brother with us, we will go down and buy thee food: But if thou wilt not send him, we will not go down: for the man said unto us, Ye shall not see my face, except your brother be with you.”* Jacob said: *“Wherefore dealt ye so ill with me, as to tell the man whether ye had yet a brother?”* They said: *“The man asked us straitly of our state, and of our kindred, saying, Is your father yet alive? have ye another brother? and we told him according to the tenor of these words: could we certainly know that he would say, Bring your brother down?”* Judah said unto his father: *“Send the lad with me, and we will arise and go; that we may live, and not die, both we, and thou, and also our little ones. I will be surety for him; of my hand shalt thou require it: if I bring him not unto thee, and set him before thee, then let me bear the blame for ever. For except we had lingered, surely now we had returned this second time.”* Jacob said to them: *“If it must be so now, do this; take the best fruits of the land in your vessels, and carry down the man a present, a little balm, and a little honey, spices, and myrrh, nuts, and almonds: And take double money in your hand; and the money that was brought again in the mouth of your sacks, carry it again in your hand; peradventure it was an oversight: Take also YOUR BROTHER, and arise, go again unto the man: And God*

Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may send away your older brother, and Benjamin. If I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved."

The men took that present, and they took double money in their hands, and they took Benjamin. They went down to Egypt, and they stood before Joseph. *"And when Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the ruler of his house, Bring these men home, and slay, and make ready; for these men shall dine with me at noon."* The man did as Joseph instructed; and the man brought the men into Joseph's house. The brothers were afraid because they were brought into Joseph's house. They said: *"Because of the money that was returned in our sacks at the first time are we brought in; that he may seek occasion against us, and fall on us, and take us for bondmen, and our asses."* They came near to the steward of Joseph's house, and they communed with him at the door of the house. They said: *"O sir, we came indeed down at the first time to buy food: And it came to pass, when we came to the inn, that we opened our sacks, and, behold, every man's money was in the mouth of his sack, our money in full weight: and we have brought it again in our hand. And other money have we brought down in our hands to buy food: we cannot tell who put our money in our sacks."* The steward said: *"Peace be to you, fear not: your God, and the God of your father, hath given you treasure in your sacks: I had your money. And he brought Simeon out unto them."*

At this point, let it be noted that these men—Joseph's brothers—had passed a tremendous test. They had brought back the money! They had proved their honesty.

The steward brought the men to Joseph's house, gave them water and they washed their feet. The steward fed their animals. The brothers made ready the present which they had for Joseph. When Joseph came home, they brought him the present, and BOWED THEMSELVES TO HIM TO THE EARTH. Joseph asked them of their

welfare, and said: *“Is your father well, the old man of whom ye spake? Is he yet alive?”* They reported that their father was in good health. And they bowed down their heads, and made obeisance. Joseph lifted up his eyes, and he saw Benjamin, his mother’s son, his own full brother. Joseph said: *“Is this your younger brother, of whom ye spake unto me?”* And Joseph said: *“God be gracious unto thee, my son.”* *“And Joseph made haste; for his heart yearned over his brother: and he sought where to weep; and he entered into his chamber, and wept there.”* *“And he washed his face, and came out; and he refrained himself, and said, Set on bread.”* *“And they set on for him by himself, and for them by themselves, and for the Egyptians, that did eat with him, by themselves: because the Egyptians might not eat bread with the Hebrews; for that is an abomination unto the Egyptians.”* The brothers were seated in place according to their ages. The men marvelled one with another. Joseph commanded the steward of the house to fill the men’s sacks with food, as much as they could carry, and to put every man’s money in his sack’s mouth.

Joseph was still working on his plan to get rid of the brothers, but at the same time he wanted to keep Benjamin with him. So, Joseph instructed that *his own personal silver cup* be put in the sack of Benjamin. This tactic, Joseph thought and planned, would give him opportunity to accuse Benjamin of stealing the cup, and would give him (Joseph) the right to keep Benjamin as a prisoner. Joseph also knew that if these were the same men he had known in earlier life—men who had sold him into slavery—that they would not be much concerned about their youngest brother.

It was done. The cup was placed in the sack of Benjamin. When the brothers had gone out of the city Joseph sent his steward to overtake the brothers, and to say to them: *“Why have ye rewarded evil for good? Is not this it in which my lord drinketh ... ye have done evil in so doing.”* The brothers said: *“Wherefore saith my lord*

these words? God forbid that thy servants should do according to this thing: Behold, the money, which we found in our sacks' mouths, we brought again unto thee out of the land of Canaan: how then should we steal out of thy lord's house silver or gold?" The brothers further said: *"With whomsoever of thy servants it be found, both let him die, and we also will be my lord's bondmen."* The steward responded: *"He with whom it is found shall be my servant; and ye shall be blameless."* Please note that this is what Joseph hoped for. The brothers speedily took down their sacks. The steward searched, beginning at the oldest and left at the youngest. *"And the cup was found in Benjamin's sack."* *"They rent their clothes, and laded every man his ass, and returned to the city."* Please note that this is NOT what Joseph had planned. He wanted these men to go on home, and only Benjamin to be brought back to him. This revealed something to Joseph about the other brothers' concern for their brother Benjamin.

Judah and his brethren came to Joseph's house, and they fell down before Joseph on the ground. Joseph said to them: *"What deed is this that ye have done?"* Then Judah said: *"What shall we say unto my lord? what shall we speak? or how shall we clear ourselves? God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants: behold, we are my lord's servants, both we, and he also with whom the cup is found."* Joseph said: *"God forbid that I should do so: but the man in whose hand the cup is found, he shall be my servant; and as for you, get you up in peace to your father."*

Then, Judah proceeded to make one of the greatest speeches ever made by any body, any time, any where. Judah came near to Joseph and said:

Oh my lord, let thy servant, I pray, speak a word in my lord's ears, and let not thine anger burn against thy servant: for thou art even as Pharaoh. My lord asked his servants, saying, Have ye a father, or a brother? And we said unto my lord, We have a father,

an old man, and a child of his old age, a little one; and his brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother, and his father loveth him. And thou saidst unto thy servants, Bring him down unto me, that I may set mine eyes upon him. And we said unto my lord, The lad cannot leave his father: for if he should leave his father, his father would die. And thou saidst unto thy servants, Except your youngest brother come down with you, ye shall see my face no more. And it came to pass when we came up unto thy servant my father, we told him the words of my lord. And our father said, Go again, and buy us a little food. And we said, We cannot go down: if our youngest brother be with us, then will we go down: for we may not see the man's face, except our youngest brother be with us. And thy servant my father said unto us, Ye know that my wife bare me two sons: And the one went out from me, and I said, Surely he is torn in pieces; and I saw him not since: And if ye take this also from me, and mischief befall him, ye shall bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave. Now therefore when I come to thy servant my father, and the lad be not with us; seeing his life is bound in the lad's life; it shall come to pass, when he seeth that the lad is not with us, that he will die: and thy servants shall bring down the gray hairs of thy servant our father with sorrow to the grave. For thy servant became surety for the lad unto my father, saying, If I bring him not unto thee, then I shall bear the blame to my father for ever. Now therefore, I pray thee, let thy servant abide instead of the lad a bondman to my lord; and let the lad go up with his brethren, For how shall I go up to my father, and the lad be not with me? lest peradventure I see the evil that shall come to my father.

We note the many beautiful and kind and loving and considerate references which Judah made about his father. We note the anxiety that Judah had to save his father from further suffering and further sorrow. We note that Judah—the very person who had wanted so desperately to get rid of Joseph—is wanting to stay in Egypt, as a prisoner, in order that his youngest brother might go home. These faces made a definite and deep impression

upon Joseph.

Then, Joseph could not refrain himself before all them that stood by him. He cried out: Cause every man to go out from me. And there stood no man with him, while Joseph made himself known unto his brethren. Joseph wept aloud: and the Egyptians heard. And Joseph said unto his brethren, I am Joseph! Doth my father yet live? And his brethren could not answer him for they were troubled at his presence.

Let it be noted and clearly recorded that Joseph had learned that these WERE NOT THE SAME MEN that in earlier days had hated him so much, and had been so unconcerned about their father, and who had sold him into slavery. They had passed every test. They were honest men, honorable men, true men. They had confessed their sins, and had recognized their guilt. They had shown real, genuine, love and concern for their father and for their brother. They were different men.

But one thing in Judah's speech stands out above all other things. Remember that at the time Joseph makes known his identity it is in the second year of the famine. Seven years of plenty have passed, and now—two years of famine; nine years since Joseph became Prime Minister of Egypt. During all these years he had had access to all the horses and all the chariots. It was only about two hundred miles to his father's home in Canaan. *Question:* Why was it that Joseph had not sent for his father? Remember also that when Joseph's first son was born he was named "*Manasseh.*" Why? "*Because,*" said Joseph, "*God hath made me to forget all my toil, and all my father's house.*" Joseph must have wondered for many days and for many years why his father had not come to find him. Brother McGarvey suggests that Joseph must have decided that if his father was not willing to send for him, to search for him, to find him, and to buy him back—then he would simply have to forget about his father!

But, it is in Judah's speech that Joseph learns that

HIS FATHER THOUGHT HE WAS DEAD! Judah mentioned it twice. This, Joseph had not known. This explained everything. And he began immediately to make plans to send for his father, and to bring him and the family to Egypt.

Joseph said to his brethren:

Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for **God did send me before you to preserve life ... God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me, but God:** And he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.

Joseph said:

Haste ye, go up to my father, and say unto him, Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt: come down unto me, tarry not: And thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen, and thou shalt be near unto me, thou, and thy children, and thy children's children, and thy flocks, and thy herds, and all that thou hast: And there will I nourish thee ... And ye shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that ye have seen; and ye shall haste and bring down my father hither.

Joseph

...fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck, and wept; and Benjamin wept upon his neck. Moreover he kissed all his brethren and wept upon them: and after that his brethren talked with him.

Jacob Goes To Egypt

The brothers returned to Canaan, with all the wagons and the supplies provided by Joseph. They said to Jacob:

Joseph is yet alive, and he is governor over all the land of Egypt.

And Jacob's heart fainted, for he believed them not.

And they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said unto them: and when he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob their father revived: and Israel said, It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die.

Jacob took his journey.

And God spake unto Israel in the visions of the night, and said, Jacob, Jacob. And he said, Here am I. And he said, I am God, the God of thy father: fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation: I will go down with thee into Egypt; and I will surely bring thee up again: and Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes.

And Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt, in the country of Goshen; and they had possessions therein, and grew, and multiplied exceedingly. And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years: so the whole age of Jacob was an hundred forty and seven years.

The Chain Of Divine Providence

The story of Joseph is the sacred story of (1) how God took the descendants of Abraham into Egypt, as he had promised (Gen. 15:13-16), and (2) how God preserved a baby nation in time of famine.

Now, let us begin at the **ending** and move toward the **beginning**. Many things had taken place, many hearts had been broken, and many horrible things had been experienced, and many years had gone by—before Joseph was able to see and to declare that “*God did send me here to preserve life.*” (1) Jacob and his family are now in Egypt, situated comfortably in the land of Goshen. Here they have the blessings and opportunities for

growth and development. Here they can multiply exceedingly, and here they can be kept a separate people. But, how did they get here? Answer: Joseph had sent for them to come. (2) But how was it that Joseph was in position to send for them, and to promise to take care of them? Answer: he was Prime Minister of Egypt. (3) But, how did he get to be Prime Minister of Egypt? Answer: He was appointed to this position by Pharaoh, king of Egypt. (4) But, why was he appointed to this position? Answer: there was a desperate need for such an appointment, the appointment of a man of wisdom, and "*in whom was the Spirit of God.*" (5) But, how was it that Pharaoh had learned that Joseph was such a man? Answer: Joseph, by the power of God, had interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh. (6) But, how was it that Joseph had come to interpret Pharaoh's dreams? Answer: first is the fact that Pharaoh had had the dreams, and, second is the fact that Pharaoh had learned that Joseph could interpret dreams. (7) But, how—from whom—did Pharaoh learn that Joseph could interpret dreams? Answer: from the butler. (8) But, how was it that the butler was in position to give this information to Pharaoh? Answer: first would be the fact that for two full years the butler had forgotten to remember a man whom he had met in prison, a man who could interpret dreams; and, second, he had learned about this man and his ability to interpret dreams when this man interpreted his dream and that of the baker. (9) But, how was it that the butler had had opportunity to meet and to learn of this man's ability to interpret dreams? Answer: because he (that is, the butler) and the baker had both had dreams; they had had the dreams while they were in prison, in the king's prison, in the same prison where Joseph was held a prisoner. Suppose Joseph had not been in THIS prison, and suppose he had not been in THIS prison at THIS particular time. (10) But, how was it that Joseph had come to be in this particular prison, at this particular time? Answer: Potiphar had caused Joseph to be placed in this prison, a place where

the king's prisoners were bound, and this special consideration likely involved the fact that Potiphar at least doubted the claims made by his wife with regard to Joseph. (11) But, why was Joseph cast into prison? Answer: because Potiphar's wife had falsely accused Joseph, and had lied about him, claiming that Joseph had sought to take advantage of her. (12) But how was it that she would have opportunity to make such accusations against Joseph? Answer: Because Joseph, in carrying out his duties with regard to the household, was often in the house. (13) But, how was it that he came to be the one in charge of the household and to perform duties within the house? Answer: he had been placed in this position by Potiphar, to whom Joseph belonged. (14) But, how was it that Joseph came to belong to Potiphar? Answer: Potiphar had bought Joseph from the Ishmaelites. (15) But, how did the Ishmaelites come to be in possession of Joseph? Answer: they had bought Joseph from Joseph's own brothers. (16) But, why was it that Joseph's own brothers wanted to sell him? Answer: because they hated him and wanted to get rid of him. They had determined to kill Joseph, but then decided to sell him to the Ishmaelite merchantmen. Note: What if the Ishmaelites had not come by when they did? (17) But why did the brothers hate Joseph? Answer: because of their father's special love for Joseph, and because of Joseph's dreams. (18) But, why did the father have this special love for Joseph? Answer: because of the fine character of Joseph; because Joseph was the son of Rachel whom Jacob loved so very much; and because Joseph was the son of Jacob's old age. (19) But how was it that Jacob came to know and to love Rachel? Answer: he met her in the house of Laban, his mother's brother. (20) But how was it that Jacob came to the house of Laban? Answer: he was compelled to leave his own home because his brother Esau had threatened to kill him. (21) But why would Esau threaten to kill Jacob? Answer: because Jacob—with his own mother—had tricked

Isaac into pronouncing upon Jacob a blessing which Isaac intended to pronounce upon Esau. (22) But why would Isaac want this blessing to go to Esau—in spite of what God had said? Answer: his own partiality toward Esau. (23) But, why this partiality? Answer: *“And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob.”*

What an amazing chain of events! All seeming to be so naturally involved in the ordinary events of life. Only twice in the entire story was there direct, miraculous involvement of God: (1) when God gave Joseph power to interpret the dreams of the butler and of the baker, and (2) when God gave Joseph power to interpret the dreams of Pharaoh. God’s providence relates to his marvelous power to overrule all the details and affairs of our lives to the accomplishing of His will—and this, without in any way, becoming responsible for the things we do that are not according to His will. God was not responsible for the brothers hatred, nor for the woman’s sinful solicitations, nor for her lying—but He could and did overrule even these things.

Brother J. W. McGarvey (**Sermons**, p. 222) writes as follows:

The man who studies the story of Joseph and does not see this in it, has failed to see one of its great purposes. And what is true in bringing about this result in the family of Jacob, may be true—I venture to say, it is true—in regard to every family ... in this world; and it extends down to the modes by which God overrules our own acts, both good and bad, and those of our friends, and brings us out at the end of our lives shaped and molded as he desires we shall be.

The story of Joseph is perhaps the greatest commentary on Romans 8:28:

And we know that to them that love God all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to his purpose. For whom he foreknew, he

also foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren: and whom he foreordained, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

I claim that the word “*good*” in verse 28 refers to ultimate glory, just as is indicated in verses 28 and 30. In fact, a basic thought which flows throughout Romans 8 is: AIDS TO GLORY—things which in God’s power and providence help us as we travel the road to glory. To all those who love God, all those who are called according to HIS PURPOSE, He has promised to work all things together to ultimate glory. Blessed assurance!

Thanks be unto God that in the story of Joseph we have the **fact of divine providence** and a great deal of information about the **nature of divine providence**.

Study Questions Over Joseph And Divine Providence

1. Who were Joseph’s parents?
2. What were at least some of the reasons for Jacob’s special love for Joseph?
3. What was the significance of the “*coat of many colors*”?
4. Why did the brothers hate Joseph?
5. Discuss the brothers’ conspiracy with reference to Joseph.
6. Who was it who sought to protect Joseph? What did he plan to do?
7. What did the brothers decide to do with Joseph?
8. What do we mean by “*the big lie*”?
9. What do we mean by “*another big lie*”?
10. Discuss Joseph in prison, the butler, the baker, the dreams, and the interpretations.
11. Discuss Pharaoh’s dreams, the butler, and Joseph.
12. What name did Joseph give his firstborn son? What did it mean?
13. When the brothers went down into Egypt to buy corn, what accusation did Joseph make against them?
14. Joseph had in mind a plan by which he wanted to accomplish two things. What were these?
15. Joseph stressed that in order for these men to “*prove*” that

- they were “*true men*” they would have to do what?
16. Besides Benjamin, which brother did not have part in the sale of Joseph?
 17. How did Joseph test the honesty of the brothers?
 18. Discuss why the brothers were so reluctant to go back to Egypt to buy corn.
 19. Discuss the silver cup and the significance of it.
 20. Discuss Judah and his great speech to the Prime Minister of Egypt.
 21. During the nine years in which Joseph had been Prime Minister of Egypt why had he not sent for his father and his family?
 22. What one thing stands out in Judah’s speech above all other things?
 23. Immediately upon his learning this (this one thing), what did Joseph do?
 24. What instructions did Joseph give with regard to Jacob and the entire family?
 25. Discuss the reaction of Jacob.
 26. Beginning at the **end** and going to the **beginning**, trace the specific “*links*” in this amazing chain of God’s providence in connection with Joseph.
 27. Why did God choose men who were so wicked, sorry, low down, and corrupt as to sell their younger brother into slavery—to become the heads of the tribes of the nation of Israel?

Chapter 9

What Does The Life Of Moses Teach About The Providence Of God?

Lynn Matheny

Man's Need

Genesis one, two and three set before us the great need man has for redemption. God created the heavens and the earth and on the sixth day made man and his bride, and placed them in Eden. God gave them wonderful blessings and positive law, but the devil succeeded in persuading them to violate God's law. By this, the devil is able to inject sin into the world (Rom. 5:12). As a consequence, human beings are born into a world where sin is, and because of transgression become sinners and are separated from God (I John 3:4; Isa. 59:1-2).

God Promises To Provide For That Need

Just as soon as the need for redemption arose, God immediately promised the Redeemer. The first Messianic promise, the very foundation for God's plan to save man, is introduced in Genesis 3:15. This passage tells us that the Redeemer would come, that He would be a member of the human family, and be miraculously brought forth. This passage also teaches us that the Redeemer would be victorious.

God Begins To Develop That Plan

With the foundational promise of man's salvation made, God began to develop that plan. The plan involves the wonderful and unusual promise made to Abraham as recorded in Genesis 12:1-3. Every word in the Bible, from this point on, has some relationship to this promise. Basically, God's promise to Abraham is the developing of his seed into a great nation, always looking forward to bringing Jesus Christ into the world, that through Him all the nations would be blessed (Gal. 3:16).

Plan Involves A Nation

Being a nation involves three things: a people, a law and a land. God began through His marvelous providence to develop this nation. At times God worked through special (with miracles) providence to carry out His plan. That special providence was exercised both in the Old and the New Testament and is apparent even to the casual reader of the Bible. There were also times in the development of this nation and ultimately in the plan to save man, that God worked through general providence. That is, He does not overrule circumstances (with miracles) but will work in the context of those circumstances to bring about His will.

People Aspect Of This Nation

In God's wisdom, He determined that the people aspect of this nation could better be developed down in Egypt, and so we are introduced to Joseph. Through marvelous providence Joseph became prime minister of Egypt and God's small embryonic nation was given special land and for a time, special privileges in Egypt. Here, in Egypt, they had the time, the circumstances, and the experiences through which to become a strong people. They would become strong in number and also strong in character.

The Need For A Deliverer

To complete God's promise to Abraham, the people have to leave Egypt. The land aspect of God's promise must be fulfilled before they can be a great nation. Since this is true, God must raise up a deliverer to lead the people out and take them to their land and also give them the third aspect of the promise, their law. In the wonderful working of God's providence, both special and general, we are introduced to Moses.

God's Providence In Getting A Deliverer Ready

"Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who knew not Joseph" (Exod. 1:8). Now the bondage of God's people will take on a different context. Special blessings from the Pharaoh will end and great trials will come upon the people. Will God be the cause of their difficulties? No, but He will use them for the development of His plan.

Pharaoh said,

Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we: come, let us deal wisely with them, lest thy multiply, and it come to pass, that, when there falleth out any war, they also join themselves unto our enemies, and fight against us, and get them up out of the land (Exod. 1:9-10).

Pharaoh's solution was *"Every son that is born (to the Hebrew) ye shall cast into the river..."* (Exod. 1:22). What a horrible thing! How can God possibly use this in the development of His plan to deliver Israel from bondage? A man-child was born to a Hebrew woman and *"she hid him three months"* (Exod. 2:2). When she could no longer hide him, to a degree, what the Pharaoh had commanded. She put the baby in the river. But she put him there with special care, in an ark, having *"daubed it with slime and with pitch,"* so it would float. Where will the ark be placed in the river? At the place where

...the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at

the river; and her maidens walked along by the riverside; and she saw the ark among the flags, and sent her handmaid to fetch it (Exod. 2:5).

Who better to find and save the baby alive than the daughter of Pharaoh! The baby's sister stood by to see what would happen and was able to suggest that she go and find a Hebrew nurse for the baby. And who better than the baby's own mother!

And the child grew, and she brought him unto Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. And she called his name Moses, and said, Because I drew him out of the water (Exod. 2:10).

Moses Is To Be God's Man

How wonderful it is to have the **Inspired Interpreter** to certify the providence of God in the life of this great Bible character, Moses. God needed a deliverer for His people. Did this leader need to be a Hebrew? Indeed he did! Would it be a great asset for him to be the son of Pharaoh's daughter? To be brought up in Pharaoh's house, be given the best education possible? Yes! A tremendous step in becoming a great leader. Would his nurse, his own mother, teach him who he was and what he was. Yes sir, she did! What a wonderful combination!

The first step in getting Moses ready as a leader was forty years in Pharaoh's house. The next step was forty years in the wilderness of Sinai. Moses knew he was a Hebrew and when "*he saw an Egyptian smiting a Hebrew, one of his brethren*" (Exod. 2:11) he killed the Egyptian. God didn't cause this terrible thing to happen but He used it to develop His plan. When Pharaoh heard of this he sought Moses' life and Moses had to flee.

But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh, and dwelt in the land of Midian: and he sat down by a well (Exod. 2:15).

Without the inspired interpreter we would have never

known how significant it was that he sat down by that well!

Because of the well he met the seven daughters of the priest of Midian. Because of Moses' character he befriended them by filling the troughs to water their father's flock. When they reported this to their father they identified Moses as an "*Egyptian*." An asset indeed and it all began with the terrible Pharaoh telling the midwives to throw all the male children in the river.

And Moses was content to dwell with the man: and he gave Moses Zipporah his daughter. And she bare a son, and he called his name Gershom; and he said, I have been a sojourner in a foreign land (Exod. 2:21-22).

For forty years Moses led the flocks of his father-in-law in the very wilderness where he would later lead God's people on the way to the promised land. God, with His providence, developing His plan!

Moses Must Go Back Where It All Started

But, the deliverer of God's people can not bring them out of Eypgt while he is living in the wilderness! So, God appeared to Moses out of a bush. Just any bush? No, not just any bush! Moses had seen a lot of bushes, possibly bushes on fire. But this was a special bush for "*the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed*" (Exod. 3:2). Moses said, "*I will turn aside now, and see this great sight...*" When God had his attention, He said,

I have surely seen the affliction of my people that are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; and I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk

and honey... (Exod., 3:7-8).

So, many years before, a little baby goes into Pharaoh's house. Now a man, God's prepared man, will go back to that house and give Pharaoh God's message, "*Let my people go.*"

Moses And Excuses

And Moses said unto God, Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt? (Exod. 3:11).

Why would Moses say, "*Who am I?*" It was simply the beginning of long and laborous excuse making and at the end of it all "*the anger of Jehovah was kindled against Moses.*" (Exod. 4:14). We should be able to understand God's anger. After all, look at the preparation that has gone into getting Moses ready to be God's man of the hour. Raised and educated for forty years as the son of Pharaoh's daughter and with many years of experience in the wilderness; Moses is God's man! Now all God has to do is persuade Moses. Much like many of the preachers today! With much study and many years of experience they should be ready "*to stand in the gap*" and help close the gaping holes that have been made in the spiritual walls of Zion by false teachers and they cry, "*give me a trouble free work!*" Many have used the excuse of "*I don't want to get involved in controversial matters*" or "*it is their business where, what and when they want to teach.*" So, when Moses said "*Who am I*" he might have had in mind "*that's a mighty controversial matter*" or maybe he thought "*what business is it of mine what the Pharaoh is doing to the Hebrew people!*" It was Moses' business! Why? Because it is God's business and Moses was God's man to help take care of God's business. No wonder God was angry. He must be angry at some of our actions today. God did not accept Moses' excuses, nor will he accept any of ours.

Moses Is Finally Ready

The writer of the book of Hebrews said,

By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to share ill treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; accounting the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt: for he looked unto the recompense of reward (Heb. 11:24-26).

I am so thankful Moses overcame his excuse making. Surely one very powerful reason for doing so was, *"the recompense of reward."* Throughout all of God's working with man, He has always blessed the obedient and condemned the disobedient. As never before, we as God's people, need to learn this lesson and we need to learn it now!

God Uses Moses

It is a thrilling study to follow Moses, and see how God works His plan step by step. So many valuable lessons can be learned. Time and space will only allow us to mention but a few.

We see Aaron *"And he shall be thy spokesman unto the people"* (Exod. 4:16). Moses and Aaron went before the Pharaoh and told him *"Let my people go"* as they spoke the message of God.

And Pharaoh said, Who is Jehovah, that I should hearken unto his voice to let Israel go? I know not Jehovah, and moreover I will not let Israel go (Exod. 5:2).

It was a sad day in the life of a man and his nation when it was declared *"I know not Jehovah."* Through Moses and Aaron God's judgment came upon a people and their gods. Nine plagues and then the death of the *"first born"* caused Pharaoh to rise up in the night, call for Moses and Aaron and say, *"get you forth from among my people, both ye and the children of Israel, and go, serve Jehovah, as ye have said"* (Exod. 12:31). Yes, sometime

it is mighty late in the night, and after much heartache, when we finally learn who Jehovah really is.

As the children of Israel left Egypt their faith was still very weak. When they saw *“the Egyptians were marching after them; they were sore afraid”* (Exod. 14:10). God had brought judgment on their enemy in such a powerful (special providence) way. Would God bring them this far, with such special care, and then abandon them? They seemed to think so!

Is not this the word that we spake unto thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it were better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness (Exod. 14:12).

The people could see only two alternatives; death or servitude to the Egyptians. But God, through His providential care, had other plans. So Moses said,

Jehovah will fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace (Exod. 14:14).

So God worked His great work in the Red Sea.

And they believed in Jehovah, and in His servant Moses (Exod. 14:31).

The people aspect of the nation has now been developed. They are strong in number and character and now have faith in God's man Moses. God through Moses, gave the people their law and took them toward the promised land. When they entered into the land, the nation promise was fully developed. We must leave Moses and enter into the lessons that we learn from the study we have done. But as we do this, let us be reminded of one final important passage.

Thus did Moses, according to all that Jehovah commanded, so did he (Exod. 40:16).

LESSONS FOR US TODAY

Miracles Were Confirmatory

All Christians believe in the providence of God. To say that we all understand it completely is surely not the case. But the way some speak of it today, even in the church, we can know that many have a misunderstanding of God's providence. A careful study of God's word shows that in the age of miracles there were many special providences manifested. Jesus Himself conferred special blessings on certain individuals and groups.

Many other signs therefore did Jesus in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name (John 20:30-31).

Miracles were confirmatory! Those done by Jesus were done to confirm that He was the Son of God.

Miracles were also used to confirm the Word.

For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward: how shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation? Which having at first been spoken through the Lord, was confirmed unto us by them that heard: God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders, and by manifold powers, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will (Heb. 2:2-4).

Miracles Were Temporary

Not only were the special providences of God confirmatory but they were temporary. God never promised that miracles would be for every age! A careful study of God's Word will show that when the confirmatory work of miracles was over the miracles ceased. Paul said "*they shall cease*" and "*shall be done away*" (I Cor. 13:8).

He said in this context that the miracles were “*in part*” and then stated, “*but when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away*” (v. 9). The “*perfect*” of verse 8 is the perfect and confirmed Word of God and is called “*the perfect law, the law of liberty*” (James 1:25).

Providence Had An Inspired Interpreter

God overruled circumstances in the life of Moses and other Bible characters. However, there was an **Inspired Interpreter** (the Word of God) to certify the providence of God. Today, we have no **Divine Interpreter** and therefore we cannot relate our circumstances as the **Acts Of God!** God still works among men and in the affairs of men but I cannot preach specific actions as such for I have no divine interpreter. We are told, “*If any man speaketh, speaking as it were oracles of God*” (I Peter 4:11). We can know concerning Moses because God spoke concerning him, but He has not spoken concerning specific circumstances about you and me or any one else living today. Surely there are things in my life, and in yours also, that appear to be providential. But how can we speak of it as such when we can’t certify it? Paul said,

...for we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus sake (II Cor. 4:5).

If you should hear me “*testifying*” as to how God is dealing with me in some “*special*” way, it would sound like I am preaching “*myself.*” When we preach Jesus Christ we are preaching a certified gospel and not a human experience.

Conclusion

Illustrations do not teach truth about spiritual matters. Only God’s word does this! But an illustration can help make Bible truths clearer and easier to understand.

Let us consider being at a stage play. The curtain goes up and Act One is presented. The curtain goes down. We know that activity is going on behind the curtain, getting ready for Act Two, but we don't know what that activity is. The curtain goes back up and we are surprised at the change that took place. We could never have guessed what it was going to look like. It is the same way with God's providence. The age of miracles was much like God stepping out on the stage with man. The curtain was up and with eye and ear man could see the power of God at work in the lives of men. But the purpose of that special work was over when the church was mature and the Word of God was confirmed and complete. The curtain came down! Is there activity? Sure, God is still at work! But the curtain is down and there is no **divine interpreter** to tell us what is happening! Preaching as if we **know** often makes God a respecter of persons, and He is not (Acts 10:34).

Let us be determined to *"seek first His kingdom"* and be *"workers together with God"* so His wonderful blessings might be ours to enjoy.

Chapter 10

How Can One Justify The "Apparent Success" Of Unfaithful Churches And The "Apparent Failure" Of Faithful Churches?

Roger Jackson

Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart. But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. Therefore, pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart can wish. They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth. Therefore, his people return hither: and waters of a full cup are wrung out of them. And they say How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High? Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches. Verily, I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning (Psm. 73:1-14).

Introduction

The prosperity of evil men and the oppression and failure of the righteous is the theme of Psalm 73. The matter presents a great dilemma for God's people in the light of His providential care which He has promised. The Psalmist almost allowed the dilemma to destroy his faith, but found the answer and rescued himself from the danger. In the same manner each of us must come to understand how sinful and disobedient men can enjoy prosperity and ease in this world while Christians suffer almost daily in many places.

The Bible tells us about a great man of faith who lived in the land of Uz. He was perfect and upright, fearing God and seeking to do what was good. When he had everything he owned taken away from him he said, *"Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord"* (Job 1:21). Job was in error when he attributed his calamities to God, just like men are today when they attribute all of their misfortunes to God. Satan had taken Job's wealth away. Job's faith was still in tact at 13:15 when he voiced the attitude of every child of God when he suffers. We must not charge God foolishly as if He stood over us with a whip. In 16:19 Job maintained his innocence and never lost sight of what was right. It is when we do so that our faith will falter.

Habakkuk could not understand how God could remain just and use the wicked Babylonians to punish Israel when they were more wicked than Israel. God had to remind him that even though he might not readily perceive the answer it was his duty to maintain his faith, and he would be safe (Hab. 2:4).

And what shall we say of the rich man who passed Lazarus daily and gave him not so much as a crumb from his table (Luke 16:19-20)? The man still fared sumptuously daily and was clothed in the garments of kings. We know that the injustice was recompensed after the

two men died, but what about this life? Is there no justice here? Is there no immediate reason for our suffering? Does God providentially care for the wicked and disobedient?

Wicked institutions enjoy prosperity even in their rebellion. Babel prospered for a season, but was destroyed because it thwarted God's purpose (Gen. 11:1-9). Why doesn't God tear down human institutions today in the same manner? In Matthew 13:24-30 the answer is given. In the world tares will grow. Since they grow in the same soil as the wheat they will enjoy the same nourishment as the wheat, hence they will prosper. To root them up would do much damage to the wheat. It would destroy the ideal situation God has created for the growth and development of souls fitted for heaven. It would destroy man's free moral agency. Thus, Inspiration spoke of a great falling away in II Thessalonians 2:8-9, and said that it would remain until Christ returns and destroys it with the brightness of His appearing. Until then it is our responsibility to understand this environment in which we live and how it works according to the plan and purpose of God. If we do not, we may go beyond the precipice on which the Psalmist stood and lose our faith. We must remember that whereas the disobedient attribute their prosperity to their faith (false religion), it does not follow that such is the reason. There is no simple or easy explanation for the prosperity of the wicked in the light of the providence of God, but the following reasons are submitted as those I have come to understand over the years.

Bible Principles Have Rewards In Themselves

In Matthew 10:42 Jesus said that the person who gives a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple "*shall in no wise lose his reward.*" Does this teach that once a person does a good deed he cannot be lost? It cannot be the case because Matthew 7:22 records that many will

claim salvation upon the basis of good deeds done in the Master's name, but who will be lost. The fact of the matter is that such acts of kindness carry their own rewards. There is the wonderful inner feeling that attends such kindness of which we cannot be denied. Should a man remain faithful all of his life such kindness will add to his enjoyment in heaven (I Cor. 3:13-14). This reward will be his even if the one to whom he gave the drink of water is finally lost. But, what about the benefit in this life? In all civilized nations kindness is a virtue rewarded in kind. This is what Jesus meant when He said,

Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom.

He did not mean that we can give expecting to make a profit or become richer for it, as many so teach. He was talking about the disposition of the recipient to return the kindness when he is on his feet again, and it works for unbelievers as well as believers. We ought to work it better than unbelievers with a preference to believers (Gal. 6:10).

The Bible teaches us that families should base their lives on Bible principles (Eph. 6:1-4). The Bible guides the home from marriage to death. The home is in trouble in our nation and around the world. The Mormons have capitalized on this crisis by making a strong appeal to the family. When desperate people see some help for their plight they gravitate to that assistance, hence the success of the Mormon religion. They don't publish their peculiarities in doctrine, which would repulse the average person, but emphasize their strong appeal to the family. In doing so they are the recipients of the benefits of practicing a Bible principal in regard to the family.

Simplicity, gentleness and humility are virtues taught in the Bible. People who are in error on a number of other matters may not be in error on the veracity of these

virtues. When the Amish people display such simplicity and piety even to the point of persecution and ridicule, people admire them and contribute to their prosperity by buying their goods and patronizing their establishments of business. Why have they prospered? They have prospered because following these Bible principles produces a reward that is natural.

Pentecostals of every color have an enormous appeal in our age. There was a time when they were the people *"on the other side of the track."* It is not so any more. Just ride by one of their *"revival"* meetings some time and take a look at the Cadillacs, sports cars and Lincoln Continentals. Why are they prospering? Is it because of God's providence? The truth is that their false claim to be able to work miracles to cure illness, pay debts and lift down trodden spirits has a tremendous appeal to people whose whole lives are troubled. Here, in the midst of their *"sanctuaries"* a person whose marriage has failed, business has crumbled or health is gone, can jump and shout about something. The successful business man can leave the pressures of the office and lose himself in the emotional frenzy and psyche himself up for another day. It is not providence that keeps them going, it is the appeal to the flesh. Denominationalism is dedicated to meeting the social needs of a sick society. People choose the church of their choice based on its ability to meet their needs, or serve them. They do not stop to think that they have a responsibility to give service to God. Hence they speak of what their religion can do for them and whether or not it filled their needs or whether they got anything out of the services today. In the Lord's church the situation is no better in some places. Here the concept of service to God is lost in self-serving congregations that spend millions on their own comfort and make themselves believe they are doing it for God. But not a dime goes for missions work (or perhaps a token contribution). Training preachers does not benefit THEM at that locality, and

they don't do it. How many congregations are really deeply involved in benevolence? When the denominations freed themselves from the authority of the Bible they freed themselves to produce prosperity by any and every means they could justify. Hence there came sideshows with personalities, gymnasiums and a clown in the pulpit. That is why they prosper and we cannot compete with them.

When The Tide Comes In All The Ships Rise

When the World Fair came to Knoxville, Tennessee, a local businessman tried to get the local businesses to invest in the fair through business ventures of various sorts whose success depended on the success of the fair. His reasoning was that when the tide comes in all the little ships rise. In other words, all of the businesses would prosper together. The tide did not come in for them, but it is true when it comes to the providence of God. Even the sects prosper out of the overflow of God's providence. People are often good to Christians and those who pretend that they are Christians. The world scarcely knows the difference. It is true, in a sense, that the sects benefit from the providence of God even though it is incidental. There are some things that I am convinced have come about as the result of God's providence whose benefits cannot be denied to strangers to the covenant. God caused water to come from a rock in the desert but if the water continued to flow from the rock after Israel had left, could the Gentiles not drink of it?

One of the most highly prized freedoms that we possess in this country is religious freedom. We believe that God's providence has provided this freedom. But we cannot deny this freedom to those who abuse it and teach false doctrine as well as build human institutions. Because they are free to do so, and because they are free to use their talents and money to garnish those institu-

tions in gold, they prosper. They do not prosper because God is blessing them, else He blesses error. They are the recipients of the overflow of the influence of the Bible. Even evil unbelievers benefit from this nation in the same way. Criminals have rights because of Bible influence even though they are guilty. In it all we must remember that every man will as surely be held responsible for his use and abuse of American freedom as those of Joshua's day were held responsible for their choices (Josh. 24:15).

A society based upon the free enterprise system allows its citizens to advance and prosper according to their abilities and opportunities. Surely we consider this freedom a part of the providence of God. Every man who makes his millions needs to thank God for the wonderful opportunity He has provided in this country. However, men fail to respond properly to that providence. He sends the rain on the just and the unjust so that their crops will prosper just like the atheist's (Matt. 5:45). However, we are warned not to use God's goodness to lay up treasures on earth (Matt. 6:19). Some of our worry about the prosperity of the unrighteous rich may condemn us because our hearts are not in the right place (Luke 12:16-21). We need to take care not to worry so much about it.

The atmosphere created by the influence of the Bible can be abused. In Romans 16:17-18 the practice of doing the best we can in proclaiming the gospel and becoming the best speakers we can was misused for personal gain. Unscrupulous men like Graham, Swaggert and Bakker use their speaking ability to lure the naive into their traps and make millions off of them. In spite of the fact that their followers defend them by claiming they do so much good, the Lord condemns such religious criminals who will say in the day of judgment,

Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name?
and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy
name done many wonderful works (Matt. 7:22).

They prosper because they take advantage of the good atmosphere created by the Bible to abuse and misuse it.

The Lord expects His people to shine. They are a light set on a hill and salt to the earth (Matt. 5:13-16). When they shine others benefit from their light. When they preserve, others are preserved with them. A man in our town who is not a Christian put in a gas station and garage. When we learned that he refused to sell alcoholic beverages the word went around, and I am convinced the man is prospering today because Christians have brought their business to him. His is a ship that rose when the tide of God's people came in.

When God made His great promise to Abraham in Genesis 12 He stated that Abraham would be a blessing to others. To that fact Lot could easily give testimony. As Abraham rose in wealth, so did Lot. As God's people live in this old world of sin and suffering they give to all like God does and share God's providence with others. People who are commanded to love their enemies (desire that they receive good in this life) should never be discouraged or shaken in faith when that good comes to them. We should rejoice and be glad that men prosper and exhort them to glorify God because of it by obeying His will.

Some Of The Faithful Are Only Pretenders

This is to say that our judgment in the matter of providence because of faithfulness is superficial. We must understand that as there are evil men in the world who prosper in spite of their sinfulness, there are brethren who are prospering, but who are unfaithful. We need not think that God is going to cause a man's business to fail or send hard times on him if he quits the church. If that were the case what do you suppose would be the main reason brethren would serve the Lord? Too many of them already attend services for the same reasons the sectarians attend their churches. They want the Lord to "*bless*" them, and by that they mean finan-

cially. When a thing is done because we are afraid that evil will come if it is neglected it is superstition and not religion. The Lord will accept no religion that is not *“pure and undefiled”* (James 1:27). However, if we were to be brutally honest with ourselves would we not have to admit that our concept of providence is that a man is made wealthy in proportion to his righteousness? The Jews held that viewpoint. That is why the rich young ruler came to Jesus and asked him what *“good thing”* he might do to inherit eternal life (Matt. 19:23-26). He thought his riches bore testimony to many good things he had done, including keeping the law with perfection. First, Jesus had to correct his misunderstanding of works. He stated that nobody was good enough to accomplish what the young man had proposed. In order to do that a person would have to be perfect in goodness, and no one could do that except God. This puzzled the apostles, who were influenced by the popular doctrine of merit. If a rich man could not be saved, since his riches bore testimony to his righteousness, then who could? The Lord made it clear that this (salvation by works of merit) was impossible with man, but God can save. Rather than being examples to the kingdom, rich men had, as a rule, been the oppressors of the righteous (James 2:1-5). This is exactly the opposite of what they believed and, unfortunately, what so many today believe. A man is not condemned because he is rich, for many rich men are living righteous lives. However, many times we violate James 2:1-5 by respect of persons based on wealth. A successful business and riches have often turned the head of the brethren so that they select a man to serve in the eldership when he does not possess half of the qualifications. The congregation that makes this oft repeated mistake will have a price to pay in the future. I do not mean at the judgment only. God knew what He was talking about when He gave the qualifications for this office. Those who try to enter it unscripturally will run it unscripturally and maintain their

position to the complete destruction of the congregation. Even these men are recipients of God's providence in a manner. They abuse it just like the sectarians and atheists do and will give account for it. We must remember that the publicans were Israelites and many of them were rich because they were thieves. They were like the rich Pharisees and Sadducees. They took advantage of what God had given through His providence.

God's People Must Be Allowed To Fail

We cannot understand or appreciate success unless we fail. Some people are born with a *"silver spoon"* in their mouth. They can only imagine how poverty and the struggle to survive feels. But some men struggle and make it on their own. They know how to appreciate what they have. Sometimes they fail and have to try again. From the pens of these men come some of our greatest uninspired stories of success that push us on to higher ground. Rising above failure makes us better men and that is the only kind that will get to heaven. God's men of faith always rose above adversity (Heb. 11:32-40). Each step along the way made them stronger. If that is not the reason for adversity then it is a cruel mockery of mankind with thorns for no reason. Even men of little or no faith learned the lesson. Thomas Edison failed thousands of times only to rise to success repeatedly. When foraging through his destroyed laboratory after a devastating fire he was asked what he would do now. *"Tomorrow,"* he announced, *"I will begin to build again."* Lincoln lost far more elections than he had won before fate or chance placed him in a position to become, not only the president of the United States, but today hailed as the greatest of those men. Did I say *"fate"* or *"chance?"* Or should I have said God's providence? God alone knows for sure. Was Lincoln a Christian? Could the God who works His will in spite of the wicked nations (Dan. 4:25) overrule the lives of wicked men without interfering by the means of the miraculous? Don't pray for our Presi-

dent any more if you don't believe it will change anything.

Adversity is a thing God allows but does not send in a fashion as to cause men to sin and be lost (James 1:13-15). However, those who do not understand adversity can allow it to ruin them. Cain is a good example. In Genesis 4:7 Cain was warned that his rejection could become such a snare unto him that he would allow sin to rule over him as if it were a man, and that this man would ruin him. Cain, like so many today, did not control his anger and allowed it to get the better of him. I know that the same thing has happened when I talk to wayward Christians who have quit the church because of some sickness, financial problem or family quarrel. They could not see the good in the bad. They thought the Lord had sent the tragedy. When an ignorant preacher stands over the remains of a child or victim of a drunkard's rampage and says, "*The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away,*" as if God were to blame for the death of infants and innocent people at the hands of drunkards, I know why so many people turn away from Him. Give the devil his due, he is responsible.

In all these things Paul was reminded that this life is transitory. He had been wealthy and influential, but it had all been taken away from him. When he said, "*...for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content*" he set the tone for the Christian. Adversity only provided more strength just like the resistance of the weight the athlete lifts repeatedly (Phil. 4:13). It is when we lose sight of the fact that under no circumstances wherein right is done will God forsake us (Heb. 13:5) that we become weak and begin to doubt. We trust always in His grand promises knowing that even if it comes to the worst we are much better off (II Cor. 5:1).

Conclusion

There is no easy answer to the problem that has been raised. Sometimes we just have to let a little bit of

time elapse and keep studying and learning in order to sort it all out. We have treated other difficult subjects the same way as we are growing in the faith. Just because we do not have an immediate answer does not mean that there is no answer. The confidence must always be there that there is an answer. For a long time, I could not answer the question. I know that God providentially cares for His people because the Bible tells me so. If I did not believe it I would not bother to pray another prayer. However, James reminds us that the prayer of the righteous avails much (James 5:16). We are commanded to pray always (I Thess. 5:17). The age of the miraculous is gone (I Cor. 13:8-10). So somewhere between natural events and the miraculous lies God's undisclosed method of answering prayer. We call it God's providence. Although God does not hear the prayer of a rebellious sinner, He can certainly hear the prayer of the righteous as long as the request is not a violation of His will (I John 5:16; I Tim. 2:1-2). These men are recipients of God's providence in behalf of the redeemed.

When we pray the Bible states that the Holy Spirit acts in an intercessory role. The controversy has ever been over the *"how"* and not the fact that such a thing is true. God will take care of His own and crown us if it is our lot to suffer even unto death (Rev. 2:10). As the sore trials of earth come upon us, we groan under the burden of the cross we must bear, we must always remember the words of David, who emerged from a cold, dark cave to become Israel's greatest king,

I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread (Psm. 37:25).

Chapter 11

How Does The Creative Power (Along With Action) Of God Relate To The Providence Of God?

Rex A. Turner

The subject assigned for this lecture reads: *“God’s Providence in the Rise And Fall of Four World Empires.”* Perhaps all who hear or read this lecture will be conversant with those four world empires, but fewer in number, no doubt, will have given thought as to how that the providence of God gave rise to those empires.

“Thou, O king...art the head of gold.” The prophet Daniel addressed these words to Nebuchadnezzar, the young and ambitious king of Babylon. God had chosen this heathen king to serve as a kind of catalyst for the good welfare of the Israelites, and the heathens as well. What an unusual choice this was, and especially since the choice was made by an omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient God.

The Man Nebuchadnezzar

The case is that God chose Nebuchadnezzar and the nation of Babylon to serve the spiritual welfare for Israel, and for that matter all mankind, including Nebuchadnezzar himself.

Held Lofty Ideals

Nebuchadnezzar was a man of high lofty ideals. He held a high appreciation for the arts and sciences of his day. He aspired to be the most cultured, capable man of the whole earth; and aside from God's servants such as Daniel, perhaps he was the most capable and cultured of all the earth. He endeavored to gather around himself the brightest minds of all the nations. If he could have known Solomon, he would have aspired to excel him.

Was a Great Builder

Nebuchadnezzar was a great builder. He elaborately decorated the temple of his god, Marduk. He made special and immense fortifications in the capital city of Babylon, and of the king's palace as well. He became especially well known for his "hanging gardens" which he built for Amytis, his Median wife who longed for her native hill country.

Was Very Religious

Nebuchadnezzar was a very religious man. When instructing Ashpenaz, the master of the eunuchs, of how that he should take certain of the young men of the seed royal to Babylon, he also gave direction that part of the vessels of the house of God should be taken and placed in the house of his god, Marduk.

Was Both Humane and Ruthless

Nebuchadnezzar could, and at times did, show humane consideration for others, as in the case of his appointing Zedekiah as king over Judah instead of some foreigner; but he was often cruel and ruthless, as when later he ordered that Zedekiah's sons be slain before his (Zedekiah's) eyes. Then Nebuchadnezzar put out Zedekiah's eyes and bound him with fetters and carried him to Babylon. He was given "*to rage and fury*" (Dan. 3:13).

Why God's Choice of Nebuchadnezzar?

Why would an impartial, just, and all righteous God choose a heathen king to rule over the nations, including his own chosen people, the nation of Israel? The answer lies in the fact that God is absolutely just, and his justice is delicately balanced with his great mercy. Israel was not a chosen nation in the sense that God was partial to Israel more than the other nations. God held a vital concern for all nations, and he cast them off only when they refused to have Him (God) in their knowledge (Rom. 1:24-32). The patriarch Abraham proved to be a man of great faith, and on the basis of his faith and commitment to righteousness, God chose him to become a model of righteousness for all peoples to follow.

Through a commitment to righteousness, Abraham and his descendants developed into a unique nation, the nation of Israel; and as such that nation served as a light to its idolatrous or heathen neighbors. In time, however, Israel began to join those heathen nations in their idolatries. In turn, therefore, God sent prophets among them to deter them from their evil course. He did everything within His power — that is, His power predicated upon a predetermination and absolute provision for the free moral agency of man — to deter those Israelites from their idolatrous course. Thus, from time to time, God gave His people *“the bread of adversity and the water of affliction”* (Isa. 30:20).

The time came when adversities and afflictions no longer deterred those Israelites from their idolatrous course. Then as a last resort, so to speak, God determined for them *“the furnace of affliction”* (Isa. 48:10). In time, Jeremiah wrote:

And the word of Jehovah came unto me the second time, saying, What seest thou? And I said, I see a boiling caldron: and the face thereof is from the north. Then Jehovah said unto me, Out of the north evil (that is, punishment) shall break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land (Jer. 1:13, 14).

In short, the caldron which God chose was Babylon.

The furnace of affliction, or the boiling caldron, was the remaining remedy for God's people, and God chose the young king, Nebuchadnezzar to administer that caldron. The fact is, however, that God also instituted an ongoing preparation for Israel's restoration when that people had been completely cleansed of their idolatry. Even during the ministry of Isaiah — more than 100 years earlier — God had caused the prophet to live, as it were, in the spirit some 150 years later and to prophecy how that God would raise up His shepherd, Cyrus, who would *“perform all my (God's) pleasure, even saying of Jerusalem, She shall be built; and of the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid”* (Isa. 44:24-28).

Now, as emphasized at the outset, Daniel, when revealing and *“interpreting Nebuchadnezzar's dream”*, declared: *“Thou art the head of Gold”* (Dan. 2:35-38). Nebuchadnezzar had seen a great image with a head of fine gold, and Daniel's *“thou art this head of gold”* meant that the young king had been chosen to administer Babylon so as to make it a boiling caldron for the Jews; and also in a certain respect to make it a caldron for all peoples as well.

Providence would prevail so as to boil the spirit of idolatry out of the nation of Judah, and at the same time to set up a spiritual influence for the disintegration of idolatry throughout Babylon, including the full conversion of Nebuchadnezzar, as indicated by his sincere praise which reads:

Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of Heaven; for all His works are truth, and His ways justice; and those that walk in pride He is able to abase (*Dan. 4:37*).

Nebuchadnezzar was one whom God had especially abased.

Four Great World Empires

The great and fearful image which Nebuchadnezzar saw was a token of the overruling providence which would proceed from God for centuries to come. That great image which Nebuchadnezzar saw had

...a head of fine gold, breast and arms of silver, a belly and thighs of brass, legs of iron, and feet part of iron and part of clay (*Dan. 2:31, 32*).

The image represented four great world empires which God would raise up to make their respective contributions to the fulness of time. To illustrate:

The head of fine gold represented the Babylonian Empire; the breast and arms of silver represented the Medo-Persian Empire; the belly of brass represented the Grecian Empire; and the legs of iron represented the Roman Empire. Through the means of divine providence each empire would be raised up to make up its distinct contribution to the fulness of time — that is, to make a combined contribution to the establishment of the kingdom of God. Paul wrote:

So we also, when we were children were held in bondage under the rudiments of the world: but when the fulness of time came, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, that he might redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons (*Gal. 4:3, 4*).

The Contributions of the Babylonian Empire

To be specific, the Babylonian empire contributed the Jewish synagogue. The Babylonian army destroyed the Jews' temple, together with the city's walls and fortifications. Thus those Jews were scattered throughout all the peoples, and the synagogue order of worship grew out of those pathetic circumstances. All people were bound to take note of those Jews who in a quiet way met each Sabbath day to chant, or to sing psalms; to read the Holy Scriptures; to pray to an only God; and to

contribute of their earthly goods for the welfare of the poor. When the gospel was first preached on Pentecost (Acts 2), there were present Jews, "*devout men, from every nation under Heaven*" (Acts 2:5), and they continually worshipped God each sabbath day in those synagogues. They surely made an impact on their neighbors and acquaintances. Thus the synagogues became the stepping stones for the progress of the gospel; and further, Jesus met for worship, and preached, and sang God's praises in those synagogues. Thus providence prevailed.

The Contributions of the Medo-Persian Empire

The Medo-Persian Empire contributed a high value upon law and order. Unlike Nebuchadnezzar who was above the law, Darius the Mede who had received the kingdom was unable even to deliver Daniel from the den of lions (Dan. 6:14-20). There really is no way to overdraw the contribution of law and order in any society. Thus providence continued to prevail.

The Contributions of the Grecian Empire

The Grecian Empire contributed a nigh universal language. In fact, Alexander the Great made some unique contributions to the fulness of time. To be specific, Alexander encouraged the merging of society, both socially and commercially; he encouraged intermarriages with the Persians; he diffused Grecian culture, religion and philosophy among the conquered peoples; and he so diffused the Greek languages among the nations that it became a nigh universal language. The fact of a nigh universal language made for an ease and fast communication of the gospel of Christ. Thus, Alexander's contribution of the Greek language greatly facilitated the spread of Christianity, some three centuries later. Providence continued to be a prevailing force.

The Contributions of the Roman Empire

The Roman Empire contributed all that had been contributed by the three prior empires; and further, that empire maintained an enforced peace (all roads lead to Rome) over the world — an enforced peace which the peoples of the earth had never witnessed before nor have they witnessed since. That enforced peace made for the rapid progress of the gospel, but Rome's greatest contribution to the progress of the gospel was a cradle, so to speak, for the young church of the Lord, and that through the means of the high point and protection of its Roman citizens. The apostle Paul, together with Barnabas, Titus, and Luke are classic cases in point. Thus providence was a prevailing force throughout those centuries of world empires.

The Contribution of the Synagogue Order Of Worship To The New Testament Order Of Worship

The Jewish order of the synagogue worship made a distinct contribution to the kind or base for the New Testament order of worship — the very worship due a sovereign God. The case is that the divine order of congregational worship grew up, and out of, the established order of worship in the Jewish synagogue, and here again the providence of God prevailed.

As has already been observed, the Babylonians destroyed the Jews' beautiful temple and carried the people into captivity. Those mournful circumstances gave rise to the synagogue order of worship. Mournful and depressed, those Jews met in small groups to worship and to pray; and in time, there came to be synagogues throughout the Greco-Roman world. Luke wrote:

For Moses from generations of old hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath (*Acts 15:21*).

When Jesus made His appearance, those synagogues were stepping stones for the progress of the gospel, and the order of worship in those synagogues served as the pattern of worship for the Jews who accepted the gospel when it began to be preached by Peter and the other apostles on Pentecost. The epistle of James, written by the Lord's half brother, and the author of the earliest New Testament epistle, referred to the church's meeting for worship within the frame-concept of the synagogue. To illustrate, James rebuked those who showed partiality to a man who came into the synagogue with a gold ring (James 2:2-4).

The Jews Worshipped in Their Synagogues

The synagogue order of worship consisted of the following:

1. Those Jews met for worship each week, and that upon a certain day of each week, the seventh or sabbath day.

2. The items, or acts of worship, consisted of the oral readings from the law of Moses, and the prophets, and the psalms; of prayers, of the singing of psalms (there was no mechanical instrument used in the synagogue as an accompaniment to their singing); and a lesson of exhortation. One reading from Acts will serve to confirm the fact of the sermon or exhortation, and other matters as well. The reading is as follows:

Now Paul and his company set sail from Paphos, and came to Perga in Pamphylia: ...But they, passing through from Perga, came to Antioch of Pisidia; and **they went into the synagogue on the sabbath day**, and sat down. And after the **reading of the law and the prophets** the rulers (elders) of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on. And Paul stood up, and beckoning with the hand, proceeded to speak (Acts 13:13-16).

3. An offering or collection was made each sab-

bath for the poor and for the financial operation of the synagogue.

4. Each synagogue had a ruler and/or elders — that is, men of age, experience, and dedication who supervised the spiritual affairs of the membership of the respective synagogues.

Thus, through the special providence of God the Christians had but two adjustments to make in their order of worship, namely: (1) a change in the day set for worship — that is, a change from the sabbath day to the first day of the week, the Lord's day; and (2) the addition of their eating or partaking of the Lord's supper — a supper which Jesus introduced to His disciples on the night of His betrayal and which He eats with His disciples each Lord's day. The account of that supper reads as follows:

Now when even was come, He was sitting at meat with the twelve disciples; ...And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it; and He gave to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And He took a cup, and gave thanks, and gave to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many unto remission of sins. **But I say unto you, I shall not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom**" (Matt. 26:20-29).

Matthew then added:

And when they (that is, Jesus and his apostles) had sung a hymn, they went out unto the mount of Olives (Matt. 26:30).

Jesus Preached in Those Synagogues

The relationship which Jesus sustained to the synagogue, and its order of worship, had a great bearing on the rise of the New Testament order of worship as it developed out of the synagogue worship. One very pertinent point is that Jesus visited and taught in the

synagogues throughout Palestine and Galilee. John records how that Jesus answered the high priest by saying,

I have spoken openly to the world; **I ever taught in synagogues**, and in the temple, where all the Jews come together; and in secret spake I nothing (*John 18:20*).

Matthew recorded how that

Jesus went about **in all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues**, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom (*Matt. 4:23*).

In another place Matthew wrote:

And coming into **his own country (Nazareth) He taught them in their synagogue**, insomuch that they were astonished, and said...Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? (*Matt. 13:54-55*).

Mark records how that **Jesus taught in the synagogue at Capernaum**, as follows:

And they go into Capernaum; **and straightway on the sabbath day** He (Jesus) entered into the synagogue and taught (*Mark 1:21*).

Luke also wrote of how that Jesus taught **in the synagogues of Galilee**, as follows:

And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into **Galilee: ...And He taught in their synagogues**, being glorified of all (*Luke 4:14-15*).

In another place, Luke not only wrote of how that Jesus **taught in the synagogues**, but he also left on record a sermon which Jesus preached in the synagogue at Nazareth. That sermon reads as follows:

And He (Jesus) came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up: and He entered, as His custom was, into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up to read. And there was delivered unto Him the book of the prophet Isaiah. And He opened the book, and found the place where it was written,

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, Because He anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor: He hath sent me to proclaim release to the captives, And recovering of sight to the blind, To set at liberty them that are bruised, To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down: and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fastened on Him. And He began to say unto them, **To-day hath this scripture been fulfilled in your ears** (Luke 4:16-21).

Jesus Sang in Those Synagogues

Another very pertinent fact is that Jesus not only taught in the synagogues of Palestine and Galilee, but He also sang the praises of the Father in those synagogues or congregations. For one point of emphasis, who would dare contend that Jesus remained silent while the rest of the congregation sang the praises of the Father? For another point of emphasis, David prophesied concerning *Jesus*:

I will declare Thy name unto my brethren, In the midst of the congregation will I sing Thy praise (*Heb.* 2:12).

Jesus went from synagogue to synagogue declaring the name of His Father, and in the midst of those congregations Jesus joined them in their congregational praise to God. There is absolutely no indication here that Jesus merely sang a solo in one of the respective congregations, as certain leaders of the Christian Church contend. The necessary inference is that Jesus joined with His brethren in their singing praises unto the Father.

The case is that the words of Hebrews 2:12 are a

quotation from the Psalms. In the psalm David was led by the Spirit to write:

For dogs have compassed me: A company of evil doers have enclosed me; They pierced my hands and my feet.... They part my garments among them, And upon my vesture do they cast lots" (Psm. 22:16-18).

Within that same frame of reference, David was moved to write: "*I will declare Thy name unto my brethren: In the midst of the assembly will I praise Thee*" (Psm. 22:22). David was a type of the Christ; and as David often sang the praises of the Father in the midst of, or in conjunction with, his brethren; just so, Jesus, the antetype of David, sang the praises of the Father in the midst of the numerous synagogues of Israel which He visited while He was on earth. The necessary inference is that in the church, the antetype of the synagogue, Christians should sing the praise of Jehovah in the midst of the congregation when assembled for worship, and especially for the appointed Lord's day worship.

One of the chief leaders of the Christian Church has observed, with respect to Hebrews 2:12, "This is a prophetic reference to our Lord singing a solo. A congregation is present but it does not sing." Did Jesus sing only that once in all those synagogues which He visited? Did Jesus sing on only one occasion and that then He sang a solo? How far will men go to support an unscriptural practice?

The author of the Hebrew epistle urged his Hebrew brethren

let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works; not forsaking our own assembling together, as the custom of some is, but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as ye see the day drawing nigh (*Heb. 10:24-25*).

In keeping with this urgent plea, the Hebrew writer continued his urging. *He wrote:*

Through Him (Jesus) then let us offer up a sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of lips which make confession to His name (Heb. 13:15).

Relative to this very explicit urging that Christians offer to God a sacrifice — the fruit of lips (“lips”), what a plurality is necessarily implied — the Hebrew writer urged the brethren:

not forsaking our own assembling together, as the custom of some is, but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as ye see the day drawing nigh (Heb. 10:25).

That day was the first day of the week. Those meetings were regularly held on each first day of the week – the day on which Christ arose from the dead. What a day that resurrection day was! What a testimony the first day of the week bears to all mankind! What a day that first day is for the assembling of Christians! What a day the first day is for multitudes to blend their “lips” in praise to God!

Conclusion

In conclusion, God’s providence prevailed when He raised up prophets among His people to instruct them in righteousness and to warn them against sins of all sorts and specifically against the fatal sin of idolatry.

Then, God’s providence prevailed when He gave His people “*the bread of adversity and the water of affliction,*” and His providence further prevailed when He determined for those people the furnace of affliction — **Babylon the boiling caldron.**

Further, God’s providence prevailed when He chose the young king Nebuchadnezzar to tend that boiling caldron; and His providence continued to prevail when He raised up in succession four world empires to the end that each empire would make its distinct contributions to the “*fulness of the time*” when He (God) would set up

a kingdom — His kingdom — which would never be destroyed.

Still further, God's providence continued to prevail when He provided that the pattern of worship in His kingdom, the church, would develop normally through the order of the synagogue worship, and thus necessitating only a change in the day for worship, and the addition of the observance of the Lord's Supper by the saints.

Chapter 12

What Do The Lives Of Elijah And Ahab Teach About The Providence Of God?

Dub McClish

Our English word, “*providence*,” comes from the Latin word, *providentia*, meaning foresight or to foresee. The equivalent Greek word is *pronoia*, but, ironically, it is not used in reference to God in the Scriptures. Divine Providence refers to the foresight of God by which He determines the needs of man and supplies the same for the accomplishment of His Divine Will. God’s Providence benefits all men generally (Matt. 5:45). However, He exercises a more specific Providence over His own faithful people (Deut. 4:40; 5:33, Matt. 6:33, 28:20). Just as we are commanded to “...*do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith*” (Gal. 6:10), so does God behave in seeing the needs of men and working to accomplish His will and our ultimate good.

The Providence of God is generally thought of only in terms of what He does “*behind the scenes*” through natural law and circumstance. By this understanding of the term we can *believe* that certain events transpire in our lives due to the Providence of God, but there is no concrete or conclusive proof upon which to rely dogmatically. Mordecai’s famous question to Esther illustrates this very point: “*And who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this*” (Esther.

4:14)? It appears that Mordecai *believed* that it was Providential that Esther was the Queen of Persia at that time (and thus in a position to prevent the destruction of her people), but there was no way he could absolutely prove it.

However, considering the aforementioned definition of “*Providence*,” we will also do well to include God’s miraculous acts in our concept of this important subject. The Bible records hundreds of supernatural acts which were the result of God’s foreseeing the needs of an individual, a family, a nation, or even all mankind, and then providing for that need. In many cases a combination of the supernatural and the natural was employed in God’s Providence. God apparently spoke to Noah directly (supernatural phenomenon) and ordered him to build the ark (natural phenomenon) to the saving of his house (Gen. 6:13-14). The rain and the fountains that produced the flood were natural, but the duration of the rain (40 days and nights) was supernatural (Gen. 7:11-12). Whereas the natural exercise of Divine Providence must always leave us with a degree of uncertainty about how or whether God was at work in certain events, when God demonstrated His Providence in supernatural acts, no room was left for doubt.

The concept of the miraculous or supernatural element of Providence is necessarily limited to the past ages in which God sometimes worked supernaturally among men. This relates both to Old Testament and New Testament records, for miracles are recorded with frequency in both. While it is not in the purview of this chapter to discuss at length the cessation of miracles, suffice it to say that the New Testament teaches:

1. Generally, supernatural acts recorded in the New Testament were for the purpose of confirming the Truth of Jesus’ claim to Deity and the Truth of the message of His messengers (John 20:30-31; Mark 16:19-20; Heb. 2:3-4).

2. When the revelation of the Gospel was completed, the miraculous spiritual gifts would no longer be necessary and would cease (I Cor. 13:8-10; Eph. 4:11-13).

3. All of the Truth was to be revealed to the apostles (John 16:13), thus the revelation was complete by the time the last apostle (John) died (cir. A.D. 100).

4. It is evident that the miraculous gifts were possessed by many saints in the first century, but that these gifts were imparted by and available through *the apostles only* is likewise evident (Acts 6:6, 8, 8:6, 14-19, 19:6 et al.).

5. Therefore, with the death of John at the close of the first century, the miraculous age came to an end as seen from a two-fold perspective: a. The need for them was past; they were for confirmation of the Word while it was in the process of revelation. With revelation finished so also was the need for miraculous confirmation finished. b. The apostles (the medium of transmission of the miraculous gifts) were no longer among men. Thus, with the passing of those last ones on whom John (the last apostle) had laid his hands (cir. A.D. 150), the miraculous element, having served its God-given purpose, ceased. Those who claim miraculous powers for themselves or for others today are themselves misinformed and are misinformers of others.

While any discussion of the operation of Providence in our time must necessarily be confined to God's working through His natural laws, there is a fruitful area of study to be found in God's employment of supernatural elements in the exercise of His Providence in ages past. In the lives of Elijah the prophet and Ahab, the King of Israel, we will see numerous illustrations of God's Providence working miraculously. Divine Providence ever smiled upon Elijah, God's faithful prophet, while it mostly frowned upon Ahab, a man of consummate evil.

Elijah And Ahab, The Men

Ahab was the seventh King of the Northern Kingdom of Israel who came to power near the end of the ninth century B.C. In his 22 years of infamous reign he had the distinction of doing *“evil in the sight of the Lord above all that were before him”* (I Kings 16:30). It was not enough that he walked in the sins of Jeroboam; he multiplied his iniquity by taking Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal of the Zidonians, for his queen, and became an avid devotee of Baal himself, to the sore anger of God (vv. 31-33; cf. 21:25-26). The evil deeds of Ahab came to an end as the result of what seems to be an act of God’s Providence.

Elijah the Tishbite was God’s fiery prophet from Gilead who confronted these malevolent monarchs with their evils, and he did so on several occasions, thereby becoming a fugitive from the wrath of them both (I Kings 17:1; 18:17-18; 19:1-3; 21:17-23). In the prophetic work of Elijah, aimed at the evils and atrocities of Ahab, God exercised His Providence in preserving the life of this great prophet time after time.

God’s Providence In The Life Of Elijah

God’s Providence at the brook Cherith (I Kings 17:1-7)

When Elijah first confronted Ahab with his sins he promised the king that there would be no more rain until Elijah so decreed. God knew that Ahab would seek to kill Elijah, so He immediately set His Providence in motion. He instructed Elijah to flee eastward and hide by the brook Cherith from which he would receive water to sustain him. At the same time, God promised to use ravens to supply the prophet with bread and meat. Obviously, the Lord used a combination of supernatural and natural means of providing for His servant in this case. God’s instruction to Elijah, telling him where to flee, was supernatural. The means of providing food for

the prophet (ravens) was miraculous, while the food itself was natural bread and meat. Both the means of provision (a brook) and the water itself were non-miraculous.

God's Providence at Zarephath (I Kings 17:8-23)

When the brook of Cherith dried up, God continued to shower His Providence upon Elijah by sending him to Zarephath, a city in Zidon. His needs would be met by a widow who had been commanded by God to sustain him. He found the woman near the city gate and asked her to bring him some water and with it some bread. The woman replied that she was even then gathering sticks to prepare her last portion of meal and oil for herself and her son as their final meal. They were apparently on the verge of starvation because of the drought. Elijah told her that, if she would make a cake for him first and then make one for herself and her son, her supply of meal and oil would not run out until God sent rain again. The woman did as the prophet directed and the supply of meal and oil was not exhausted, though they all ate from it many days. God also helped His prophet by enabling him to raise the widow's son from death, thus answering her allegation that he had come to bring evil rather than good, and causing her to confess him certainly to be God's spokesman. Again, the natural and the supernatural are combined in this Providential sustenance of Elijah. God's instructions that he should go to Zarephath were supernatural, and it would appear that His "*command*" to the widow there to sustain the prophet was also miraculous. Elijah's first meal there did not involve the miraculous, for the widow simply made a cake from ingredients she had in her kitchen. However, every meal she prepared thereafter, as long as Elijah was in her house, was the result of God's supernatural Providence in keeping the meal and oil supplied. God used Elijah to

repay the widow's hospitality by bringing her dead son back to life.

God's Providence In The Contest On Carmel (I Kings 18:1-40)

In the third year after Elijah told Ahab that it would rain no more until he gave the word, God sent him to the king to announce that it would rain again. However, before making that announcement, God's prophet strongly condemned Ahab for his apostasy in worshipping Baal. In order to reveal who the true and living God is, Elijah proposed a contest between himself and the prophets of Baal and Asherah, 950 of them altogether, on Mount Carmel. Ahab consented, and the prophets and a great crowd of people, including the king, assembled. The contest was simple, but graphic and powerful. The prophets of both Baal and Elijah would slay a sacrificial animal and lay it upon an altar, with the false prophets doing so first. No fire would be placed on the altar of Baal or of Jehovah. The prophets of Baal were to call upon him to consume the sacrifice with fire and Elijah would call upon the Lord with the same request. Whichever answered the fire would be shown to be God.

The prophets of Baal called upon him from morning till evening, even mutilating themselves with knives in their frenzy. Elijah added to their shame by sarcastically suggesting that they might need to cry louder on the chance that Baal might be talking, taking a journey, or even taking a nap! Of course, no answer came from the nonexistent god. Elijah then gathered the people about him, repaired the torn-down altar of the Lord, slew his animal and placed the wood and the sacrifice on it. However, to dramatize the power of God even further, he made a trench around the altar and had water poured over the sacrifice and the wood three times and had the trench filled with water. Then, in a moment of great drama, he called upon God to make Himself known and to show that Elijah was his servant. God then sent such

a fierce fire that it consumed not only the wood and the sacrifice, but even the stones of the altar and the water in the trench. In response, the people fell on their faces and proclaimed Jehovah to be God. Elijah, with the help of the people, then took the prophets of Baal to the brook of Kishon where Elijah killed them.

As in all of Elijah's prophetic activity, the supernatural element is prominent in this contest, although natural elements are interwoven with it. The gathering of Israel at Carmel, the provision of wood, sacrificial animals, and stones for the altar of God, and the extinction of the false prophets all employed non-miraculous means. However, the climactic event in the Carmel contest was the starting fire that God supernaturally sent upon His altar. In this episode God's Providence was demonstrated in several ways: 1. The exposure of the falseness of Baal and the prophets of Baal was a great gift to a deluded nation. 2. The powerful, undeniable manifestation of the true and living God was likewise most beneficial to Israel, causing them to acknowledge God. 3. The confirmation before Ahab and all of the people (including the false prophets) of Elijah as a man who belonged to God and who spoke on behalf of God was most timely in those dark days of evil in Israel. 4. The slaying of the false prophets by the prophet of God was a sign of God's utter abhorrence of their false religion and of all of those who practiced it, especially its leaders.

God's Providence In Sending The Rain (I Kings 18:41-46)

Elijah told Ahab that he could quit mourning over the destructive drought because it would soon rain again. Upon giving this announcement he then mounted the peak of Carmel and bowed himself in prayer that it might rain (cf. James 5:18). Six times he sent his servant to look out over the Mediterranean for any sign of a rain cloud while Elijah prayed, only to be told there was no cloud in sight. He was sent a seventh time and this time

the servant reported a cloud over the sea like a man's hand. Upon receiving this news, the prophet warned the lingering Ahab he had better begin his journey homeward before the impending rain stopped him. The rain, accompanied by wind, soon came in abundance out of a sky black with clouds, and the drought of three and one-half years was broken. The Providence of God was still over them. We may observe that in this series of events God's Providence was manifested through the natural process of rain, in specific, undeniable answer to the prayers of the devout prophet. The supernatural element was involved in that God sent the rain just as Elijah said He would and at just the time he said it would be sent. Although we cannot expect such an immediate and direct answer to our prayers as that received by Elijah, there is still a practical lesson for us in this persistence with which he prayed.

God's Providence In Providing Food Under The Juniper Tree (I Kings 19:1-8)

Ahab did not wait long to tell Jezebel of the slaughter of her prophets by Elijah. Her response was to send a message to Elijah that she would see to it that he met their same fate. He fled for his life to the wilderness south of Beersheba where he sat down under a juniper tree, begging the Lord to let him die. Instead of allowing this request, while the prophet slept, the Lord sent an angel to him, telling him to arise and eat the cake and drink the water the Lord provided. He did so and slept again. The angel awakened him again, urging him to eat and drink more because of the long and hard journey he was taking to Horeb. In this scene the prophet was weary from traveling, famished for lack of food and drink, isolated from his home and people and tired of running from the wrath of an evil king and queen. He was tired of the fight with evil. In his utter discouragement, God's Providence came to his aid. By means of the angel, both food and encouragement were once more provided in

Elijah's hour of need. Again, supernatural and the natural elements were combined in these provisions.

God's Providence In The "*Still Small Voice*" At Horeb (I Kings 19:9-18)

In his flight from Jezebel's threat, Elijah journeyed all the way to Sinai where he took up residence in a cave. When the Lord asked him why he was there, he rehearsed his faithful service to God among a rebellious people who had forsaken the law, torn down God's altars, and slain God's prophets. He was there because his life was in danger due to his faithfulness, and he believed himself to be the only faithful one left in all Israel. God then produced a mighty wind, an earthquake, and fire, but did not reveal Himself to Elijah in any of them. Following those mighty demonstrations of power God then made Himself known to Elijah in a "*still small voice*," by which He asked him again why he was in Horeb. Elijah gave the same reply as before, after which God instructed him to anoint Hazael over Syria, Jehu over Israel, and Elisha to succeed himself. God then told Elijah that there were still 7,000 in Israel who had not gone after Baal. All of these demonstrations, conversations, and instructions seem to have had at least the following Providential purposes: 1. To restore the courage and determination of the weary, discouraged prophet and 2. to anoint the men (through Elijah) who would bring God's vengeance upon the House of Ahab and the disobedient and rebellious nation of Israel. As in God's previous dealings with the prophet, there is a combination of the natural and the supernatural. God produced the mighty outpourings of power upon Horeb and then spoke to the prophet in the "*still small voice*," all of which were miraculous. However, through the anointing of Hazael and Jehu by Elijah, He would pour out His wrath upon apostate Ahab and Israel by means of treason, assassination, and war — all non-miraculous, yet nonetheless the working of God. The

work that Elisha would do in Israel would involve further supernatural elements of God's Providence.

God's Providence Concerning Naboth's Vineyard (I Kings 21:1-24)

Ahab coveted a vineyard, owned by a man named Naboth, next to his palace in Jezreel. When Naboth refused to sell it because it was his inheritance, Ahab pouted like a child and would not even eat. When Jezebel learned the cause of his depression she promised to deliver the vineyard to him. Through a wicked plot she had Naboth killed and told Ahab he could take possession of the vineyard. As he was on his way to do so, God was telling Elijah what Ahab had done. He was to go immediately to confront him with his sin of murder and theft and with the judgment that the dogs would lick up his blood at the very place where they had licked up that of the stoned Naboth. The prophet was also to announce to Ahab the end of his dynasty and the consumption of Jezebel by dogs by the wall of Jezreel. These terrible iniquities were the "*last straw*" in the eyes of the Source of all justice, truth and integrity. God's Providence intervened to keep Ahab and Jezebel from concealing their evil deeds of murder and larceny concerning Naboth. The intervention was miraculous in that the Lord spoke to Elijah, informing him of their wickedness, and instructing him what to say concerning them. The message was delivered to Ahab from the mouth of a man, which did not involve the miraculous.

God's Providence In Consuming Ahaziah's Soldiers By Fire (II Kings 1:1-16)

Ahaziah succeeded Ahab, his father, when Ahab was killed in battle. When the new king injured himself in a fall, he sent messengers to Ekron to inquire of the pagan idol, Baalzebub, if he would live or die. As they were going, the Lord's angel told Elijah to go and meet them and shame Ahaziah for implying that there was no

God in Israel by sending to Ekron to inquire of Baal. He also was to answer the king's question about his health — he would not rise up from his bed, but would die. When the king's messengers returned with this report, Ahaziah sent a captain and 50 men to arrest Elijah, but the prophet called upon God to consume them with fire. This was done a second time with the same result. A third contingent of 51 men was sent, the captain of which begged before Elijah for his own life and for the life of his men. An angel told the man of God he could now go to the king in safety, which he did, delivering God's message of impending death to him in person. He died as Elijah had prophesied. God was no more pleased with Ahaziah's preference of Baal over himself than he was with that of his father, Ahab. In God's Providence He saw to it that Ahaziah was both reprov'd and punished for his wickedness. By miraculous means, Elijah was informed both of Ahaziah's deed and of the Lord's message for the king. Likewise, by miraculous fire from Heaven, God demonstrated to 102 soldiers of the king (and thus to the king himself) that He was indeed "*alive and well*" in Israel and that He had a man through whom He spoke and acted. As before, God used the mouth of His prophet (a non-miraculous medium) to deliver His message to a wicked and idolatrous king.

God's Providence In Taking Elijah To Heaven (II Kings 2:1-11)

The Providence of God which had ever been over Elijah throughout his courageous life was present to the very end of his earthly sojourn. The translation of Elijah to heaven had apparently been revealed by God to both Elijah and his successor, Elisha, as well as to the schools of the prophets. The two prophets traveled from Gilgal to Bethel, from thence to Jericho, and then to the Jordan River. Upon arriving at each place they attracted "*sons of the prophets*" who met them with the message that Elijah would be taken that day. When Elijah and Elisha

came to the Jordan, the elder prophet folded his mantle and struck the waters, causing them to part and providing a dry passage for the two men. As they passed on eastward from the river, a chariot of fire, drawn by fiery horses swept down and picked up Elijah, and he was born up into heaven by a whirlwind. This remarkable translation of Elijah into heaven without his tasting death (as with Enoch, Gen. 5:24; Heb. 11:5) was a remarkable demonstration of the miraculous element of God's Providence, by which He demonstrated His great delight in this storied prophet.

God's Providence In The Life Of Ahab

God's Providence In Withholding The Rain (I Kings 17:1, 7)

The withholding of rain from Israel was a direct consequence of the evils of Ahab (I Kings 16:30-33). Undoubtedly, this was not only punitive in purpose, but intended to bring about repentance in the wicked king, if possible; thus it was "*Providential*." The sore drought and famine that resulted from the three and one-half rainless and dewless years was a natural effect. However, the withholding of the moisture was done miraculously by God through His prophet Elijah – the drought was not a mere freak circumstance of nature.

God's Providence In Sending Rain Again (I Kings 18:1-46)

Having brought extreme drought and famine upon Ahab and Israel because of the king's iniquity, the Lord determined it was time to reverse this condition, perhaps to see if he had learned anything and to give him an opportunity to repent. Leading up to the restoration of rain was the mighty contest at Mount Carmel, demonstrating both to Ahab and to all of the people the falseness of Baal and the fidelity of Jehovah. Immediately after this mighty demonstration, the Lord sent rain

in response to the pleas of Elijah. This was likely done so that the faithfulness and power of the Lord would still be fresh on the mind of Ahab and so that he could not avoid crediting the Lord with the needed rain. The rain came by natural means (from dark storm clouds), but it was sent specifically by the will of God at that particular time, thus showing Divine intervention.

God's Providence In The Syrian Wars (I Kings 20:1-43)

Ben-hadad the Syrian, with a confederacy of 32 other kings, encamped around Samaria and demanded Ahab's unconditional surrender. Ahab refused this demand and God sent an unnamed prophet to him telling him that the enemy would be delivered into his hand. With only a small force of 7,000 led by 232 princes, Ahab's forces totally routed the Syrian host. God's purpose in this miraculous, Providential victory was to prove to Ahab that He was indeed the Lord. God's prophet warned Ahab to prepare for Ben-hadad's return the next year to fight Israel in the plain. The pagan king was under the superstition that Israel's gods were "*gods of the hills*" and since Samaria was in the hills, this was why Ahab prevailed. He thought if he fought Israel in the plain, the gods would be on his side. As predicted, Ben-hadad assembled the same sized force as that with which he besieged Samaria and encamped at Aphek. Ahab's forces encamped nearby and were like "*two little flocks of kids*" compared to the host of Syria.

God sent His prophet to Ahab a third time, telling him that God would once more give the Syrians into his hand, and for the purpose once more of demonstrating God's power to the apostate king. The Israelites destroyed 100,000 Syrians in the first day of battle, causing the rest to flee into the city of Aphek where another 27,000 were killed under a wall that collapsed. Ben-hadad and his servants first hid, but the servants convinced him that the only possible way to avoid certain

death was to throw themselves on the mercy of Ahab. Ahab called him his “*brother*,” spared his life, accepted several promised concessions from him, and then sent him on his way home with a covenant of peace. Ahab’s mercy was misguided and displeasing to God. One of the sons of the prophets was sent to Ahab to tell him that because he had allowed Ben-hadad (whom the Lord wanted Ahab to destroy) to go free, Ahab would have to pay with his own life. This occurred in the battle Ahab led against Ramoth-gilead some three years later (I Kings 22:37).

God’s purpose in the several acts of Providence concerning these wars with the Syrians (involving both the miraculous and the non-miraculous) is plainly set forth: to prove to Ahab that Jehovah, not Baal or any other alleged deity, was the Lord, the true God. There was no immediate indication that Ahab learned anything from all of these wonderful deliverances and direct messages from God’s prophets.

God’s Providence In Events Relating To Naboth’s Vineyard (I Kings 21:1-29)

A full account of the lust of Ahab for Naboth’s vineyard, his refusal to see it, Ahab’s resultant depression, and Jezebel’s “*solution*” to this problem has already been recited. God sent Elijah to Ahab with a strong message of condemnation for their wicked deed. Ahab was also told that his posterity would be cut off from reigning in his stead because of his multiplied evils and he was given certain horrible details concerning his own death and that of Jezebel. This strong message from the prophet finally made an impact upon the heart of Ahab (perhaps the cumulative effect of God’s previous acts of Providence also finally had their effect). He genuinely humbled himself and repented, causing God to inform Elijah that he would hold off the evils he had pronounced against Ahab during his lifetime, but would visit them upon the king’s son. Unfortunately, Ahab’s

repentance was not long-lasting, and within three years he would be dead because he listened to the hired false prophets rather than to God's prophets (I Kings 22:1-37). The message of Elijah to Ahab is definitely seen to have been Providence that served God's purpose of bringing an evil man to his knees. This Providential sequence involved both the miraculous (God gave the message to Elijah) and the non-miraculous (Elijah delivered the message to Ahab).

God's Providence In The Campaign Against Ramoth-Gilead (I Kings 22:1-40)

Ahab determined to take Ramoth-gilead from the Syrians and he persuaded Jehoshaphat, King of Judah, to be his ally. Before mounting the campaign, Jehoshaphat suggested they ask the Lord about their plan. Ahab assembled the 400 court prophets who, knowing the king had his heart set on this effort, encouraged him to go. Jehoshaphat apparently did not trust these prophets and asked if there was not a prophet of God to consult. Ahab told him there was, and he sent for Micaiah, but warned that he hated this prophet because he always prophesied evil concerning him.

At first this faithful prophet mocked the king by telling him to proceed with his plans just as the false prophets had done. However, Ahab recognized what he was doing and demanded that he tell him the Lord's will. Micaiah then told Ahab that if he went into battle Israel would be without a king, meaning that Ahab would be killed. The prophet also told the king (in what may be a parable) not only that his prophets were liars, but that God had sent a lying spirit in their mouths so that Ahab might be encouraged to go into this battle and be killed. God's true prophet was then sent to prison by the king to be placed on a diet of bread and water until he had returned from battle. The two kings carried out their plan to attack the Syrian city, Ahab disguising himself so as to go unrecognized by Ben-hadad, whom he had earlier

spared after defeating him in war. One of the Syrian soldiers drew his bow *“at a venture”* and the arrow mortally wounded Ahab. He died and was brought back to Samaria and buried, bringing a wicked and inglorious life and reign to an end.

There are some remarkable instances of Providence in this setting. That Micaiah was informed of the Lord both what would happen to Ahab and that it was His will that Ahab die are both revelations and therefore miraculous. However, here we also see the Providential use God made of the lying prophets to persuade Ahab to do the very thing that would fulfill the will of God concerning Ahab. The natural working of Providence is also seen in the unknown Syrian bowman whose arrow struck its mortal blow between the joints of Ahab’s armor.

God’s Providence In The Many Prophetic Messages To Ahab

God sent five different prophets to Ahab (Elijah, an unnamed prophet, a *“man of God,”* an unnamed *“son of the prophets,”* Micaiah) to variously warn him, threaten him, set before him incontestable evidences of His power, and foretell his downfall. Elijah was sent several times and the unnamed prophet was sent twice with God’s message. Except for one occasion Ahab remained unmoved from his course of wickedness. If ever a man lived who had no excuse for continuing in his iniquity, Ahab was that man! In God’s Providence Ahab had warning piled upon warning, threat added to threat, and demonstration combined with demonstration to stimulate him to lasting repentance and obedience, but he responded hardly at all.

Conclusion

In this study of God’s Providence in the lives of Elijah and Ahab He is seen to be gracious and merciful as He cared for Elijah’s needs on several occasions, and

in His mercy toward Ahab when he once humbled himself. God is also seen to be wrathful and just in the judgment against sin and rebellion in His dealing with the iniquitous life of Ahab. In all of the working of God's Providence in the lives of these two men it is demonstrated that God has the best interests of these two men in mind in the way He dealt with them. However, His love and concern for His nation of Israel is also seen in the many attempts to rescue them from idolatry and all of its corruptions. Beyond these things, His concern for all mankind is seen in that He demonstrated in these events His incomparable power, His mercy, and His justice for the admonition of all future generations. How wonderful is the Providence of God!

Chapter 13

What Do The Lives Of Samuel, Saul, David, And Absalom Teach About The Providence Of God?

Tom Holland

According to the inspired apostle Paul there are at least three values of Old Testament Scripture for New Testament Christians, namely, to encourage steadfastness, or patience, to provide comfort, and to inspire hope (Rom. 15:3). All three of these potential blessings should come to those who take the time to study God's providence at work in the lives of Samuel, Saul, David and Absalom.

The providence of God is implicit in the Biblical revelation of God as a knowing, personal and loving Being. Deism, with it's notion that God began the universe and then assumed a hands off policy, such like one would wind a clock and then the clock is on its own, is repudiated by the Biblical doctrine of divine providence.

Materialism, ranging all the way from the philosophical assertion of Pantheism to a crass devotion to material things, is repudiated by the Biblical doctrine of divine providence.

Divine providence means that God knows His people personally, loves us individually, and is actively involved in our lives. God's activity in our lives is such that He

does not deny us individual freedom from decisions either right or wrong. One who chooses to rebel against God and to devote his/her life to sin will indeed experience the negative aspect of God's providence, namely, one will reap as he/she has sown (Gal. 6:7-8).

On the other hand, those who submit to God's will and who commit their lives to Him shall experience God's working in their lives because those who love God and do His will are assured that all things work together for their good (Rom. 8:28) and they are promised eternal life (Gal. 6:8).

Let us therefore spend some time looking at the lives of Samuel, Saul, Absalom and David and when we observe God's providence at work we surely can be encouraged toward patience, we can be strengthened in hope, and hearts wearied by some continuing illness, family problem, stressful joy experience, or anything which burdens our souls, can find relief and be refreshed in the realization that Almighty God is actively involved for good in the lives of His people.

I. Samuel

The name Samuel implies God's providence. The birth of Samuel came as a result of a woman who could not have children and who took a lot of abuse because of it (I Sam. 1:5-7), asking God to give her a son (I Sam. 1:10-11). God indeed answered Hannah's prayer even as Eli had assured her (I Sam. 1:17). So when Hannah's son was born she named him Samuel, which means "*asked of God.*" Prayer is certainly a recognition of and a request for divine providence. If God is not actively involved in the lives of His people, why pray (Matt. 7:7-11)?

One who reads Hannah's prayer when she gave her son to God can get an insight into this woman's understanding of God's active involvement with His people. God is a "*God of knowledge*" (I Sam. 2:3). He is actively involved in the lives of people (I Sam. 2:6-9). He shall

overrule the designs of the wicked (I Sam. 2:9-10).

Samuel saw the negative aspect of God's providence. God revealed to young Samuel the fate of Eli's family because Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas, had made themselves vile and Eli had not restrained them (I Sam. 3:13). Therefore, Eli's family was destroyed. In rejecting God's instruction relative to parental responsibility people sow the seeds of sorrow, shame and suffering.

Samuel surely appreciated the positive thrust of God's providence. Samuel assured Israel that if she would turn away from idolatry and worship and serve God truly then the Lord would deliver Israel *"out of the hand of the Philistines"* (I Sam. 7:3). Later the Lord intervened to help Israel win the battle over the Philistines. In celebration of God's providence Samuel set up a stone at Mizpeh and named the stone, *"Ebenezer,"* which means, *"the Lord helped us."* There is a line in an old song, *"O Thou Fount Of Every Blessing"* which says *"Here I raise my Ebenezer, hither by thy help I've come."*

One sees God's providence when Israel rejected God's theocracy and desired a king to be like other nations. On the one hand, the people were sacrificing their freedom in favor of a ruler who would use their sons and daughters, take their goods at His discretion, involve them in war, and tax their fields, vineyards, flocks and herds. That had been the way earthly kings had acted. In rebelling against God they were choosing a hard and demanding life. God would simply let *"nature take her course,"* i.e., this is the way earthly kings conducted affairs of state. When men are determined to have their way God will let them follow that course and then He will permit the inevitable consequences to come upon the disobedient people (I Sam. 8:6-22).

On the other hand, God could overrule the folly of man and still achieve His ultimate purpose of bringing a Savior into the world who would set up a kingdom that would never be destroyed (Dan. 2:44; Heb. 12:28).

II. Saul

Saul was Israel's first king. When the people of Israel were determined to have a king, God chose Saul to be that king (I Sam. 9:17). When Saul was anointed by Samuel with a vial of oil to be king Samuel said,

Is it not because the Lord hath anointed thee to be captain over his inheritance (I Sam. 10:1).

When Saul was presented to the people at Mizpeh Samuel said,

See ye him whom the Lord hath chosen, that there is none like him among all the people (I Sam. 10:24).

God's providence was at work in Saul becoming king of Israel.

Although Saul was God's chosen one to be king over His people that fact did not deprive Saul of personal choice and responsibility. Saul acted rashly and foolishly in offering sacrifices at Gilgal which only the priests were to do. Samuel plainly told Saul that he had "*done foolishly*" and had not kept the word of the Lord (I Sam. 13:8-14). Furthermore, Saul disobeyed God by sparing king Agag, king of the Amalekites and the best of their flocks and herds, when the order had been: "*utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not*" (I Sam. 15:3, 9). God sorrowed that He had made Saul king because Saul was disobedient to God (I Sam. 15:11). Furthermore, the man whom God had chosen to be king He later rejected (I Sam. 15:23).

God's providence may indeed work in one's life to bring blessings and honor. However, God's providence does not deprive one of human responsibility. God's providence does not reduce man to a puppet status. Man is still free to respond to God or reject the will of the Lord.

God's chosen king, Saul, by his own disobedience disqualified himself from being the king of God's people. God told Samuel that the time had come to anoint one

whom God had provided to be king (I Sam. 16:1).

Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brethren; and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward (I Sam. 16:13).

Eventually, Saul who at one time had been chosen of God to be the first king of Israel, died a shameful death. He lost his sons in a battle with the Philistines. He was seriously wounded in the battle and finally committed suicide. God's providence did not deprive Saul of personal choice nor personal consequences.

III. David

David is said to be "*a man after God's own heart*" (Acts 13:22). One sees in the life of David many manifestations of God's providence.

In David's encounter with the Philistine giant, Goliath, David trusted God to enable him to win the battle. David said to Goliath,

...for the battle is the Lord's and He will give you into our hands (I Sam. 17:47).

God's providence worked in David's life to spare him from the destruction fostered by the envy of Saul. This was partly done by Michal, Saul's daughter who became David's wife, learning of a plot to kill David, slipping David out of the house and then putting a dummy in the bed (I Sam. 19:12-17), and partly by Jonathan, Saul's son, becoming a good friend of David's and warning David to flee from Saul (I Sam. 20). So God used the love of a woman for her husband and the kindness of a friend toward a friend to preserve the life of the one whom He had chosen to be king. In this way God used natural means to accomplish His purpose.

Thirty year old David began to reign as king. He indeed "*grew great, and the Lord God of hosts was with*

him" (II Sam. 5:10). Because God was with him David was able to win victory after victory over the Philistines. David even recovered the ark of the covenant that the Philistines had captured.

More importantly, God promised David that from His seed one would come whose kingdom God would establish eternally (II Sam. 7:12-16). God's providence worked for several centuries to bring the King, the seed of David, into the world to set up a kingdom which would stand forever!

The positive thrust of God's providence is seen in David's life from the time God took David from "*following the sheep, to be ruler over my people, over Israel*" (II Sam. 7:8, to the coming of David's son (Matt. 1:1) whom God would raise up to sit on David's throne (Acts 2:22-36).

However, one also observes in David's life the negative thrust of God's providence. God's providence in one's life does not prevent a personal decision to sin nor does it cause God to regard sin lightly.

The day came when the "*man after God's own heart*" evidently forgot how God had blessed his life. David lusted after another man's wife. He committed adultery with her. God's law very plainly said, "*Thou shalt not commit adultery*" (Exod. 20:14). David was not a victim of his own passion unless he willingly surrendered to lust. Adultery was his choice. Instead of God protecting David from the consequences, the Lord let the effects come. Some sins are difficult to conceal. When David's plan to get the husband home from war so it would seem that he had fathered the child failed. David then plotted to have the husband killed. David had opened a Pandora's box.

When Nathan the prophet pictured to David what was done David thought the person who did what actually he had done was worthy of death! What David had really done was "*despised*" the Lord who had been so good to him (II Sam. 12:10). Although David con-

fessed, *"I have sinned against the Lord"* (II Sam. 12:13), there were inevitable consequences. The sex and killing that David had instigated would come back to haunt him. David would eventually know how his rebellion against God hurts the heart of a loving God because David's son would so rebel against him. David would indeed reap the negative thrust of God's providence (II Sam. 12:11).

IV. Absalom

The son of David is a classic example of the negative thrust of Divine providence. This is a moral universe. God is in control. There are certain inevitable consequences of rebelling against God.

The late B. C. Goodpasture in his sermon, *"Is The Young Man Absalom Safe?"*, observed that there are three things which reveal Absalom's character: one, Absalom was a murderer. He killed David's oldest son and Absalom's half brother, Amnon. Two, he *"was disloyal and hypocritical in dealing with his father."* Three, he was *"ambitious and rebellious."* (**Sermons and Lectures**, Nashville, TN: B. C. Goodpasture, 1964, pp. 152-155).

While it is true Absalom was David's son and treated David much the same way that David had by lust been led to rebel against God, nonetheless Absalom still had to pay for the choices he made.

The law of God that should have directed Absalom's life declared:

Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee (Exod. 20:12).

Instead of doing this, Absalom rebelled against his father and even sought to take David's throne. Absalom showed contempt for his father by going into David's concubines in a tent on top of a house *"in the sight of all*

Israel" (II Sam. 16:20-23).

Absalom, who had "*stolen the hearts of the men of Israel*" (II Sam. 15:6), pretended that he wanted to go to Hebron to pay a "*vow unto the Lord*" (II Sam. 15:7). Actually, Absalom was intending to go to Hebron and there set up his kingdom in a conspiracy against his father. David, who had plotted to have an innocent man killed in an attempt to cover the sin of adultery, is now the victim of a conspiracy by his own son to take David's throne. However, David's sin did not justify Absalom's rebellion. Indeed, David's rebellion against God may have planted a seed that later germinated in Absalom's heart. But Absalom is a being of choice also.

The battle which eventually involved the forces of Absalom and the loyal soldiers of David took place in the woods of Ephraim (II Sam. 18:6). When Absalom's mule ran under the thick boughs of an oak tree Absalom's head was caught in the boughs and Joab, David's general, cast three darts into Absalom's heart. Then ten young men of Joab finished killing Absalom and threw his body in a pit and covered it with a pile of stones.

Absalom is a classic case of the negative thrust of God's providence.

In the lives of Samuel, Saul, David and Absalom one sees that God is vitally concerned and actively involved in the lives of His people. Those who trust Him, submit to Him, and serve Him are the recipients of God's good providence working for their ultimate good. But those who rebell against God sow the seeds that will eventually result in God's threats relative to rebellion and disobedience becoming a reality.

The God of the Old Covenant is the God of the New Testament. His demands of men may change but He does not change (James 1:17). A change of laws (Heb. 7:12) does not mean that under the New Covenant (Heb. 8:7-12) God is less concerned about His people nor that He is not involved in their lives (Rom. 8:28).

Whatever the hurts, sorrows, disappointments, or

pain, God in His own good time and His own good way will bring it together for the good of those who love Him. He is omnipotent, therefore, able to so serve His people. He is a loving God and, therefore, willing to serve them. I'm grateful that I am a child of a God who knows me personally, is interested in me individually, and seeks my good now and eternally.

Chapter 14

What Does The Life Of Esther Teach About The Providence Of God?

Adron Doran

And they told to Mordecai the words of Esther. Then Mordecai commanded to answer Esther: Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape the king's house, more than all the Jews.

For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there relief and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place, but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed. And who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this. (Esther 4:12-14).

The above statement made by Mordecai, the Jew, to his cousin, Queen Esther, represents his faith in the providence of God to devise a plan to save the Jews from destruction. He is pleading with Esther to recognize her opportunity and assume the responsibility to make herself available to God as an instrument to carry out his purpose. Mordecai is saying to Esther that if she is not responsive to the open door that God has opened to her then he will accomplish his purpose through others and she will suffer the consequences of her refusal to act. Mordecai indicates his faith in God's power to bring deliverance to the exiled Jews and that Esther is in a strategic position for this purpose at a propitious time.

The Book Of Esther

The Book of Esther represents the wondrous working of the providence of the Almighty God. Faith in the providence of God presupposes faith in the omnipotence, the omnipresence and the omniscience of God. The apostle John wrote: (Rev. 19:6) *“And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude..saying Alleluia, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.”* The apostle Paul said to the men of Athens (Acts 17:28) *“For in him we live and move and have our being.”* King David sang: (Psm. 147:5) *“Great is our Lord and of great power; his understanding is infinite.”* The angel of God told Cornelius that God remembered his prayers and alms and that arrangements were being made for him to be told *“words whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved”* (Acts 11:14). God is truly all-powerful, all-knowing and all-present and his providence is shed abroad throughout the lands.

The historical Book of Esther has come under scathing attacks from destructive critics who have mounted severe charges against the authenticity of the book. Though the writer of the book is unknown to us that is no reason to reject it as a part of the Old Testament any more than we would reject the Epistle to the Hebrews, as a part of the New Testament simply because the author is not identified. The authors were moved to write by the Holy Spirit and their works have been prepared by the providence of God for our learning.

Some have questioned the genuineness of the Book of Esther and have scoffed at the claim for providence when the name of God is never mentioned along with the names of men and women. However, as Matthew Henry pointed out, *“If the name of God is not in it, his finger is.”* No doubt the attitude of Mordecai toward God was the same as David when he petitioned, *“Let thine hand help me for I have chosen thy precepts”* (Psm. 119:173).

Jerome, in his Latin Vulgate, gave sanction to the book as a part of the Hebrew Canon and even though he added seven chapters, he clearly noted where these begin and declares that they are not found in the Hebrew rendering at all.

The time of the events recorded in the Book of Esther and the date of the recording of these events are equally uncertain. However, we do know that the events transpired after the establishment of the Persian Empire and while many of the Jews were still living under the dominion of Persia. Furthermore, we know that Xerxes was reigning as the king (486–465 B.C.). Some scholars propose that the events recorded in the Book of Esther took place during the sixty year time span between the sixth and seventh chapters of Ezra and that the record was written by Ezra, Mordecai, Nehemiah or someone else who was intimately acquainted with the latter part of the fifth century (444–434 B. C.). Let us have no doubt but that the Book of Esther represents the providential care of God for his people and the mighty power of God to work through individuals and governments to accomplish his purpose.

Ahasuerus, King of Persia

Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus (that is Ahasuerus which reigned from India to Ethiopia, over a hundred and seven and twenty provinces) that in those days when the king Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Sushan the palace, in the third year of his reign, he made a feast unto all of his princes, and his servants; the powers of Persia and Media, the nobles and princes of the province, being before him: When he shewed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honor of his excellent majesty many days, even a hundred and four score days. And when these days were expired, the king made a feast unto all the people that were present in Sushan the palace, both unto great and small, seven days in the court of the garden of the king's palace...Also Vashti the queen made a feast

for the women in the royal house which belonged to king Ahasuerus (Esther 1:1-9).

Ahasuerus has been identified as the same king Xerxes of the Persian Empire including the one hundred and twenty seven provinces extending from India to Ethiopia. He was the son of Darius by his wife Atossa the daughter of Cyrus. He was the first of the children born to Dairus after he became king. He succeeded his father to the throne of the kingdom of Persia, Media and Babylon in 486 B. C. upon the death of Dairus. Xerxes is best known in secular history for the unsuccessful war which he waged against Greece (480–470 B. C.) in which he led 2,000,000 soldiers in battles to see only 500 of them live to tell the story. He encountered Leonidas at the Pass of Thermoplae and was utterly defeated by Themistocles at Salmis. Ahasuerus had just returned from his invasion of Greece when the story of Esther begins to unfold.

During the third year of the reign of King Ahasuerus (483 B.C.) he arranged for a great feast at his royal palace in Sushan to show and tell of his greatness. The feast lasted for 180 days during which the guest drank the royal wine from individual gold cups. Wine was served in great abundance and everyone drank according to his own pleasures. While the men were eating and drinking with the king the women were being entertained by Queen Vashti at a feast in the royal house.

Vashti, The Rejected And Deposed Queen

The name of Vashti is unknown in history except what is recorded about her in the Book of Esther. The name of Xerxes' queen is listed as Amestris, who is reputed to have been a cruel and superstitious woman.

The king's feast seems to have degenerated into a drunken brawl where the conversation turned to a discussion of the beauty of their women. Ahasuerus

indicated his great pride in the beauty of his queen Vashti. The king had become "*merry with wine*" and lost his sense of respect for the dignity and morals of his wife and commanded her to appear at the feast and show herself to the company.

The context seems to imply that the king commanded more of Vashti than merely to appear and bring greetings to his friends. He probably ordered her to wear immodest clothing if not to come in the nude. We know assuredly that no decent husband would have exposed his wife to such indecent behavior had he not been inebriated. Noah would not have exposed himself and been found naked by his sons except that he was drunk on the wine which he had made (Gen. 9:20-23). Solomon wrote that wine when it is red, "*biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder, thine eyes shall behold strange things and thine heart shall utter strange things*" (Prov. 23:32-33).

God did not look with favor upon the conduct of king Ahasuerus, but he no doubt used the occasion to open the way for Vashti to refuse to comply with the demands, for Ahasuerus to take advantage of the opportunity to depose Vashti as queen and to make possible for Esther to get in a position where she could intercede on behalf of her kinsmen. God has established a record for using evil men and their deeds to bring good to his chosen. The Apostle Paul admonished the Roman saints to "*overcome evil with good*" (Rom. 12:21). It is quite evident that God used Mordecai and Esther to soften the heart of the heathen king and to overcome his evil intents with good.

Vashti refused to obey the command of the king delivered her by the eunuchs at which refusal "*the king was enraged and his anger burned in him.*" He consulted with the wise men of his cabinet regarding the course which he should pursue in dealing with the obstinate queen. They all with one accord advised the king to write an unrevocable order, as binding as the laws of the

Medes and Persians, that *“Vashti come no more before king Ahasuerus and let the king give her royal estate to another who is better than she.”* The king was advised of this action because of the possible effect of what Vashti had done could have on other women dealing with their husbands. Though the Lord God would not have approved of the decision of the king to put away Vashti in this manner, yet because of the hardness of the king’s heart, he permitted it to be implemented.

Mary Gendler has written a book entitled, *The Vendicaion Of Vashti* in which she observes that the story of Esther shows *“rather forcibly through the experience of Vashti that the king did not love assertive women.”* Gendler further claims that *“Esther remains loveable by being somewhat bashful, modest, beautiful and, above all, by approaching him obliquely.”*

Esther, The Myrtle

After these things, when the wrath of king Ahasuerus was appeased, he remembered what she had done, and what was decreed against her. Then said the king’s servants that ministered unto him, let there be fair young virgins sought for the king...and let the maiden which pleaseth the king be queen instead of Vashti. And the thing pleased the king; and he did so (Esther 2:1-4).

The Book of Esther first introduces the Jewish maiden whom Ahasuerus selected to be queen as *“Hadassah, that is Esther”* (2:7). The name Hadassah seems to have been given to her either by her parents or by her Jewish relatives after the death of her parents. The name Hadassah came to be known also as Myrtle for some unknown reason though there has been much speculation in an effort to explain it. The name Esther, in all probability was given to Hadassah because of its Persian significance when she entered the harem of Ahasuerus. It was not unusual to find Hebrews who had

close communion with the courts of foreign kings to take on names with national significance as in the cases of Daniel and his three friends who were in Babylonian captivity (Dan. 1:7). The author actually meant to identify the person Hadassah as being the Jewish maiden who later took the Persian name Esther.

Esther, of Jewish decent, had been reared by her cousin Mordecai as an orphan. The record reads (2:7) that "*she had neither father nor mother.*" Some critics interpret this statement to imply that her father may have died before she was born and her mother may have died at or shortly after her birth. At any rate, Esther grew to maturity as the ward of Mordecai, "*who took her as his own daughter.*"

Esther moved from the residence of Mordecai into the king's palace and given into custody of Hegai, one of the chamberlains or eunuchs of the court. Hegai took a special interest in Esther and showed great kindness and favor to her. Hegai spent twelve months in detailed preparation of Esther to take her turn in appearing before the king.

The narrative (2:16) indicates that Ahasuerus took four years to make the decision on which of the virgins would be selected to wear the crown of the deposed queen Vashti. The Jewish historian, Josephus, estimates that there may have been as many as 400 of these maidens whom the king received. While on the other hand, if the procedure was to present one of the maidens each day to the king (2:19) then in four years under this plan there could well have been nearly 1500 of them.

Christians decry such a procedure as the one through which the heathen king went in selecting a wife. Also, the participation of Mordecai and Esther, orthodox Jews, in the process when the seeming "*chance*" of any damsel being selected depended upon her own beauty and upon the caprice and humor of the king. However, the record indicates that God had already chosen Esther

as the successor of Vashti and that the king's heart was in God's hand to turn it where he would by the appearance of Esther before the king. We recognize the free will of man while at the same time we acknowledge the efficient and never failing providence of God.

When the turn of Esther came (2:15-18) she not only "*obtained favor in the sight of all them who looked upon her*" but more importantly, she won the king's heart. The record says: "*And the king loved Esther above all the women, and she obtained grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins, so that he set the royal crown upon her head and made her queen instead of Vahsti.*" Let us remember that at this point in time Esther had not revealed to the king or members of the court her Jewish heritage (2:20).

Mordecai, The Benjamite

Now in Sushan the palace there was a certain Jew, whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite; who had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captivity which had been carried away with Jeconia, king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away. And he brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther his uncle's daughter: for she had neither father nor mother and the maid was fair and beautiful; whom Mordecai, when her father and mother were dead, took for his own daughter (Esther 2:5-7)

Mordecai's father, Jair, was a brother of Abihail who was the father of Esther, which made Mordecai and Esther paternal cousins. We conclude that Kish, the great grandfather of Mordecai was carried away with Jehoiachin, the last king of Judah into Babylonian captivity by Nebuchadnezzar in 597 B.C. If this assumption is valid, then Mordecai was born in exile. If not, then Mordecai himself was "*carried away from Jerusalem with the captives*" and would have been well over 100 years old. He would have been 122 years old in the

twelfth year of Ahasuerus' reign when the king made him vizier which is unlikely.

It is thought by some historians that when Cyrus invaded Babylon in 538 that he may have brought Mordecai back with him to Sushan. There is no evidence that Mordecai returned to Jerusalem when Cyrus gave permission for the temple and walls to be restored. We know nothing of his formal education but we realize that his early preparation placed him in a strong position with the king as had been the case with Joseph and Daniel. The king had enough confidence in his ability that he was made prime minister of Persia.

In the beginning, Mordecai served the king as a sort of receptionist and gate keeper who would admit those who should enter the palace and forbid those who should not enter. It was while he sat in the king's gate that he overheard two of the eunuchs plotting to assassinate the king. Mordecai told Esther of the pernicious plan of the chamberlains and she relayed the information to her husband. Following an inquiry into the matter the culprits, Bithan and Teresh, were found guilty and both were hanged on the gallows.

The act of Mordecai strengthened the positions of him and Esther with the king. A record of the event was entered into the king's diary or Chronicle. After a sleepless night, the king asked that the Chronicles be read to him and he was reminded of what Mordecai had done to uncover the conversation which saved the king's life. Because of what Mordecai had done for the king, his life was salvaged from the heinous plot conceived by Haman. In all of the happenings with which Mordecai was involved, we can clearly discern the finger of God moving.

Haman, The Magnificent Agagite

After these things, did king Ahasuerus promote Haman, the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, and advance him, and set his seat before all the princes

who were with him. And all the king's servants, who were in the king's gate, bowed and did obeisance to Haman; for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai bowed not nor did reverence to him (Esther 3:1-2).

The name Haman is of Persian root and means splendid or magnificent and such he was in the eyes of Ahasuerus and members of the court. It is altogether probable that as an Agagite he was a descendant of the Agag kings of Amalek. The Amalekites were the most ancient foe of Israel (Exod. 17:8-16). The Lord had sworn that he would have war with Amalek from generation to generation. This feeling between the Jews and the Amalekites may account for the strong cleavage which developed between Mordecai and Haman in the court of Ahasuerus. Balaam referred to the Amalekites as *"the first of the nations"* and went on to say that *"his latter end shall be that he perish forever"* (Num. 24:20). The prophet Samuel sent king Saul on his first military expedition to make war against the cruel and vicious people (I Sam. 15). God ordered David to pursue the Amalekites after they had invaded and burned the city of Ziklag and kidnapped the women. I Samuel 30:17 records that *"David smote them from the twilight even unto the evening of the next day; and there escaped not a man of them, save four hundred young men who rode upon camel's and fled."* It has been conjectured that Haman was one of the posterity of these escapees, who had been scattered among the nations.

There was a strong resentment upon the part of Mordecai, the Jew toward Haman the Agagite and an intense bitterness upon the part of Haman toward Mordecai because he would not bow before Haman at the king's gate. Mordecai, no doubt, saw Haman as abiding under the curse of the God of Israel and for conscience sake he had no respect to show and no homage to pay.

Haman endeavored to take vengeance against

Mordecai by persuading the king to issue a writ of destruction against all of the Jews who, as exiles, were living in the Persian empire. Haman promised to pay into the king's treasuries "*ten thousand talents of silver.*" As a part of his devious plan to hold Mordecai in public disdain, Haman, in consultation with his wife and friends, arranged to have a seventy-five foot gallows built on which Mordecai would be hanged. The whole plot by Haman went awry when Queen Esther, at the pleading of her cousin, revealed her true national identity to the king. Esther petitioned the king to reverse the order to destroy the Jews and persuaded him to authorize that Haman be hanged on the scaffold which he had prepared for Mordecai.

Deliverance Came To The Jews

Then the king, Ahasuerus, said unto Esther, the queen, and to Mordecai, the Jew, behold I have given Esther the house of Haman and him they have hanged upon the gallows, because he laid his hand upon the Jews. Write ye also concerning the Jews as it pleaseth you, in the king's name, and seal it with the king's ring; for the writing which is written in the king's name, and sealed with the king's ring, may no man reverse (Esther 8:7-8).

The first company of captives left the land of Babylon under the permissive order of King Cyrus to return to Jerusalem in 536 B. C. the second body of Jews under leadership of Ezra returned to the ancient city in 458 B.C. The third contingency to return to the land of Judah was under the leadership of Nehemiah in 445 B. C. It is evident that a large number of Jews remained in the land of Persia and found a high level of comfortable living. There did, however, remain in the minds of the Jews in exile a deep consciousness that they were the chosen of God as well as upon the part of the citizenry of the land in which they lived.

The order issued by Mordecai over the insignia of the king authorized the Jews to destroy all of those who attacked them and to defend themselves against all of their enemies. The confrontation between the Jews and the inhabitants of Persia resulted in the loss of many lives in Sushan and throughout all of the one hundred twenty seven provinces. Mordecai wrote a letter to all of the Jews ordering them:

To establish this among them, that they should keep the fourteenth day of the month of Adar and the fifteenth day of the same, yearly, as the days in which the Jews rested from their enemies and the month which was turned unto them from sorrow to joy and from mourning unto a good day; that they should make them days of feasting and joy, and of sending portions one to another and gifts to the poor (Esther 9:21-22).

The Jews understood to do as Mordecai had written unto them and they called the days which they observed the days of Purim.

THEFEASTOFPURIM

Wherefore they called these days Purim after the name of Pur. Therefore, for all the words of this letter and of that which they had seen concerning this matter, and which had come unto them; the Jews ordained, and took upon them, and upon their seed and upon all such as joined themselves unto them, so that it should not fail, and that they would keep these two days according to their writing and according to their appointed time every year; and that these days should be remembered, and kept throughout every generation, every family, every province and every city; and that these days of Purim should not fall into disuse among the Jews, nor the memorial of them perish from their seed (Esther 9:26-28).

Purim came from the word Pur which described the lot cast by Haman to determine the day on which the order to exterminate the Jews would be executed. There

is some questions about whether Haman was trying to settle on a day that would prove most pleasing to Ahasuerus or would be most disturbing to the ceremonies to the Jews. Haman finally settled on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar as the effective day for the massacre of the Jews. Instead, the Jews were delivered from the hands of the enemy and engaged the day in defending themselves against the aggressor. Thus, the Jews established and observed the Feast of Purim commemorating the days of their deliverance.

The observance of the Feast of Purim continues among the orthodox Jews to this good day. They observe the feast because of their unbelief in Jesus Christ, the only begotten of God, who abolished all of the Jewish feasts by his death upon the cross of Calvary and instituted the Lord's Supper to be observed by Christians to show His death until He comes.

Conclusion

After a lengthy and careful study of the Book of Esther, we conclude that there were numberless instances when decisions were made and events transpired that the *"determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God"* operated through His providence. It is admitted that faith in the providence of God implies certain elements of surmise, but there seems to be no other way to account for the unusual happenings except that the hand of God was involved. No more faith is required to believe that the providence of God is present in the affairs of men than is required to believe that all events and choices are subject to fate, chance and coincidence. Many of the sinful actions of men are permitted and tolerated by God and the outcomes are overruled for good to them that *"are called."*

Let me point out some of the specific instances recorded in the book where the providence of God is highly evident and visible.

The first portrayal of the providence of God is in the

birth and rearing of the Jewess, Hadassah. She was begotten, conceived and born according to God's natural laws of procreation. However, Jehovah's influence is manifested in the fact that, on the death of her parents, she was adopted and reared by her cousin, Mordecai, *"who had taken her as his daughter."* The opportunity for Esther to deliver the Jews from the wicked plot of Haman would have been negated had she grown up in the homes of other relatives. Esther revealed her identity to the king at the instruction of Mordecai, *"Just as when she was brought up by him."* God saw to it that the preparation provided to Esther in the house of Mordecai was such that would cause her to arise to the occasion with no fear for her own life. Esther said, *"if I perish, I perish"* with full confidence she was doing the will of God.

The second body of evidence provided regarding the providence of God is in the way and manner that Ahasuerus went about selecting a successor to Queen Vashti. Virgins were chosen from each of the 127 provinces but Esther was the only candidate from among the exiled Jews. When the *"fair young virgins"* were brought before the king, there was always some unknown reason why none pleased him though he took four years to complete the process. God intended that the relative of Mordecai, the Jew, would *"obtain grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins."* So the heathen king *"set the royal crown upon her head and made her queen instead of Vashti."*

In the third place, Mordecai held a lower position than Haman in the king's court and was little known by Ahasuerus. However, the providence of God operated to such an extent that Mordecai found himself in close proximity to the two unfriendly eunuchs who concocted the nefarious scheme to assassinate the king. Mordecai overheard the conversation of the chamberlains and sent the information to the king through Esther. Ahasuerus not only sentenced the criminals to death, but he recorded the fact that Mordecai gave him the report in

his Chronicles. When the conflict between Haman and Mordecai finally surfaced, the attitude of the king was conditioned by the report that saved his life. Such happenings are traceable to the operation of the providence of God.

Furthermore, the providence of God operated to overthrow the evil plan of Haman to execute Mordecai upon the gallows and to turn the plot into a situation where Haman and his ten sons were slain and Mordecai was promoted to a place of high honor in the sight of the king. There is no doubt but that the intrigue was meticulously laid and all things seemed to be in order for Haman to watch the hanging of Mordecai. However, Haman had not calculated the power and might of the hand of God and his determination to save the Jews from annihilation. God saw to it that the hangman's rope was fastened around the neck of Haman instead of Mordecai. Thus God delivered not only Mordecai from destruction but all of the Jews who inhabited the land of Persia were spared.

Finally, we see the presence of the providence of God in the decision of Mordecai and Esther to proclaim the Feast of Purim. God wanted the Jews to know that he had delivered them from destruction and wanted them to remember the deliverance by the hand of God by feasting every year with joy and thanksgiving.

It seems to me that the providence of God can be seen in the decision of Mordecai not to return to Jerusalem but to remain in Persia. He knew that there were others who could rebuild the walls and gates of the city but that God needed him to help save the remnant of the Jewish nation which stayed in Babylon. It could well have been that there were none who could or would have deterred the madman Haman in his plan to kill the Jews who remained as captives. What would have happened to God's people in Persia had not Mordecai and Esther "*Come to the kingdom for such a time?*" There is no question but that God used them to avert the

murderous plans of Haman and bring the vengeance of God, once again, upon the royal descendants of Amalek.

The Psalmist David, a king in his own right, and “*a man after God’s own heart*” seems to place the providence of God in proper perspective when he sang:

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will we not fear ... the Lord of hosts is with us ... be still and know that I am God (Psm. 46).

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Chapter 15

What Do The Lives Of Daniel And Friends Teach About The Providence Of God?

H. A. (Buster) Dobbs

The prophet Daniel, and his companions were dragged into Babylonian captivity by the invincible army of the great King Nebuchadnezzar. It was the purpose of the Monarch of Babylon to denationalize these Hebrew youths, and educate them in the customs of Babylon. This procedure would make these four young men effective tools for more easily governing their countrymen.

The first step was to give the Hebrew children (they were probably about 15 years of age) Babylonian names. They were of

...the seed royal and of the nobles; youths in whom was no blemish, but well-favored, and skilful in all wisdom, and endued with knowledge... (Dan. 1:3-4).

Daniel's new name was Belteshazzar; Hananiah became Shadrach; Mishael had his name changed to Meshach; and Azariah commenced to be Abed-nego.

Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego were to undergo three years of training, and then they would stand before the king. They were not the only Hebrew children of nobility carried into Babylon, and destined to be the pawns of Nebuchadnezzar. The Bible does not tell us how many other blue-blooded Jewish

boys were in this same category, but there must have been several.

The King's Appointment

And the king appointed for them a daily portion of the king's dainties, and of the wine which he drank (Dan. 1:5).

The king's meat would contain some items unlawful for a Jewish boy to eat. The wine on the royal table – wine offered as an oblation to idols – would be an offence to Jehovah. Though very young, Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego recognized the sinfulness of sitting down to eat and drink in the dining hall of a pagan ruler.

Daniel's Refusal

But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the king's dainties, nor with the wine which he drank (Dan. 1:8).

This young man understood that to partake of the required diet would defile him. He formed the determination to make no compromise with evil, even though it might seem to be a small thing.

The other Hebrew captives of royal blood participated in the program outlined by the Babylonians without objection or complaint. Daniel and his three friends sought an alternative.

“God made Daniel to find kindness and compassion in the sight of the prince of the eunuchs” (Dan. 1:8). Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego were given permission to abstain from the king's dainties, and allowed to eat pulse and drink water for ten days.

“And at the end of the ten days their countenances appeared fairer, and they were fatter in flesh, than all the youths that did eat of the king's dainties” (Dan. 1:15). At the end of three years of training the young nobles from

captured lands came before the famous king Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel, Hannaniah, Mishael, and Azariah stood before the king, and he preferred them above all the rest.

God's Provision

Two things stand out in this account of the four young Jewish men in their first three years of Babylonian captivity. First, God made Daniel to find favor in the sight of the eunuch who was in charge of their training. Second, though they ate a less rich diet than the others, they were healthier and fatter than their counterparts.

How came this to be? Who can explain it? The eunuch who stood in awe of his sovereign, might have been expected to curtly reject the request of Daniel, but was rendered favorable toward the young man.

The Bible says God caused the eunuch to look upon Daniel with kindness and compassion. How did God do that? The eunuch was unaware, apparently, of any influence upon him.

He was through and through a pagan, and devoted to the service of the monarch of Babylon. There is not suggestion that he was aware of any outside influence that caused him to treat Daniel and his companions with courtesy, and grant to them the special privilege they requested. Still, it happened, and the Bible says that God caused it to happen.

No miracle produced this happy result. The influence upon the eunuch, that fell out to the good of Daniel and his friends, was in the realm of providence.

We can learn from this incident that the providential action of God cannot be explained any more than his miraculous acts can be rationalized. We do not know how God did it. We know it was not a miracle, because it did not overwhelm the eunuch.

God can produce an outcome, without a miracle, that is beyond the ability of human understanding. We can confidently believe this to be true, even though we

cannot account for it.

Providence And Obedience

When we deliberately do precisely what God tells us to do, providence assures an outcome that is beneficial to us. No man has ever suffered any real damage as a result of careful obedience to divine injunctions, but, to the profound reverse, such submission produces benefits, and blessings.

The laws of God are given for our good, and not for our hurt. Civil laws protect good people and punish evil doers.

For rulers are not a terror to the good work, but to the evil. And wouldest thou have no fear of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise from the same: for he is a minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain; for he is a minister of God, an avenger of wrath to him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be in subjection, not only because of the wrath, but also for conscience sake (Rom. 13:3-5).

We have no problem understanding and accepting this teaching. We know the need for society to be governed by law, and the need for applying law with an even hand. Ideally, law is blind to differences among men, and treats all alike. Law should not be a respecter of persons.

The laws of men ought to be obeyed because of conscience. We admit the need for law. We acknowledge that anarchy is intolerable. Conscience therefore should compel us to keep the law.

The laws of God must also be respected and obeyed. The law breaker will be punished, and, besides, there is the matter of conscience. There is no special class, but all receive the same treatment before the law of God. God is not a respecter of persons! What He does for one, He will do for all under the same set of

circumstances.

The providence of God protects all who faithfully keep the law of God. *“All things work together for good.”* But only to those who love God, and live according to his purpose (Rom. 8:28). To live according to the purpose of God is to hear the call of Christ through the gospel, and respond to that call with obedience.

Whereunto he called you through our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So, then, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye were taught, whether by word, or by epistle of ours (II Thess. 2:14-15).

The law of God is not our enemy, but is our friend. There should be no attempt to avoid commands of the Almighty, but a firm determination to obey in detail *“not only because of the wrath, but also for conscience sake.”*

Daniel and his partners feared violating their covenant with God more than they feared the anger of even Nebuchadnezzar. They would not transgress the dietary law God had given them through Moses, nor would they worship an idol by drinking wine that had been devoted. So God providently protected and promoted them.

Other Jewish boys, brought out of Judea to the Mesopotamian valley, apparently had no such scruples. They may even have considered it a minor thing to eat and drink what their law did not allow. They did not see that to eat things sacrificed to an idol was to worship the idol, because they did not want to see it. Grown men, surrounded by luxury, pomp, show and circumstance would be overwhelmed by the comforts offered to these boys, and powerfully tempted to conform to the king's program.

Jehovah expects us to be scrupulous in keeping His instructions. Nothing commanded by the ruler of the universe is too small for us to obey. When we are conscientious in observing every detail of God-breathed

directions, the economy of God works in our favor. No man can expect the protection of divine providence if he is careless in his obedience.

God Is Fair

In redemption the conditions apply to all alike. God has no favorites. Every person who fears God and works righteousness is acceptable to Jehovah (Acts 10:35). God refuses no reverent, obedient soul. All have the same criterion. That standard is written in a book, giving an equal chance to all. The requirements of that yardstick are couched in plain words and simple terms that can be easily understood by those who wish to obey. Were it otherwise God would be guilty of partiality.

Because of the essential justice of God we must conclude that the providence of God applies to people on the same basis. God does not do for one what He refuses to do for another under identical circumstances.

Problems

This necessary conclusion presents some problems. James killed but Peter set free (Acts 5). God apparently preferred either James or Peter. It was either good to die, or it was not. If it was good to die at an early age, then God preferred James and deprived Peter. If it was not good to die prematurely, God favored Peter and punished James.

The case of Peter and James must not cause us to decide that God is arbitrary in His dealings. God plays no favorites. He treats all alike.

A miracle gave Peter his freedom. We distinguish between miracle and providence. A miracle is a supernatural act. Providence is the provision of God within the frame work of natural law.

A miracle is always obvious, in the nature of the case. Providence is not discernible, in the nature of the case. We cannot take our finger and trace out the

providence of God. We believe the Lord provides for and protects His own, but are cautious in what we say about providential benefits.

Still, there was a difference in the treatment of these two apostles. There were considerations, not apparent to our eyes, that caused God to send an angel to release Peter, and to allow Herod to kill James.

In order to work out His eternal purpose for the total good of the whole human race, God, in His infinite wisdom, may cause things to happen, or not happen, that to our uneducated eye may appear to favor one above another.

We do not see as God sees. Our limited view is in sharp contrast to His unlimited view. We see only a brief span, and God sees from eternity to eternity. We are in a poor position to make judgments on the action, or lack of action, of God in any matter.

We must be very discreet, and humble. We know God is just. We know therefore that any apparent differences in His treatment of His creatures are the result of our ignorance, and not of His partiality. There are many things about providence that are beyond our comprehension. In these areas we must not say more than we know.

The free agency of all men – even wicked men – is a part of the equation almost impossible for a limited, mortal mind to grasp. Yet man must be free to act as he will, if God's purpose is realized and His holy name is glorified. Because of free agency, we must all live under the fallout of life, and this sometimes may seem unfair. The unfairness of it, however, is not because of God, but because of the foolishness of man.

Providence Does Not Preclude Suffering

God provided for Daniel, but he was not exempt from distress, strain, and misery. God's care and concern for people does not include immunity from sorrow and suffering.

“Jehovah is my shepherd” and so therefore *“I will fear no evil.”* The Lord does not guarantee to his followers that nothing unpleasant will ever happen to them. He does not pledge freedom from sickness, and sorrow, but to the profound reverse warns that all who would live godly shall suffer persecution. Still, his sheep fear no evil.

“And we know that to them that love God all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28). How can bad things work for good? Experience shows that the godly of the earth will be faced with disagreeable happenings. Even Jesus confronted unhappy things that brought tears to his eyes. Paul was stoned and left for dead. Did that work for his good? Of course it did! The persecution produced steadfastness; *“and steadfastness approvedness; and approvedness hope: and hope putteth not to shame”* (Rom. 5:3-4).

Displeasing events can work for our good, if we will let them. It all depends on our attitude. If we trust and obey God, we will have a disposition that calculates good out of whatever occurs.

A child dies. Like David, we respond to the tragedy by saying, *“I cannot bring the child back to me, but I can go to him.”* Good is the result. All things work together for good to them that love God. The experience may bring bitter tears to our eyes, and put a lump in our throat, but it will work for our good, if we love and obey God.

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, then who is against us? He that spared not his own son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not also with him freely give us all things? Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth; who is he that condemneth? It is Christ Jesus that died, yea rather, that was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or

anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Even as it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long: We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us (Rom. 8:31-37).

In all what things?

The things mentioned; tribulation, anguish, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword, death, and slaughter.

Through all things we are more than conquerors!

Notice, the finest and the noblest were not given surcease from agony. The apostles of Christ, to whom the Lord had promised, "*Lo, I will be with you always,*" were physically abused in savage persecution. Still, they suffered no evil. Still, all things (even torn and bleeding flesh) worked together for their good. Still, though killed all the day long, they were conquerors in Christ.

Providence does not prevent taking up one's cross. Providence does not mean absence of physical suffering. The elite of the church may have their bodies ravaged, and die from cancer. The bravest soldier in the army of Christ, fighting the enemy on the front lines, may suddenly drop dead from a heart attack. Poverty may befall the righteous, and unceasing pain may rack his body, but he fears no evil, and is more than a conqueror. The saint may, or may not, dine on fillet mignon, but he is sure to have this day's supply of bread. He may not pillow his head in deluxe surroundings, but his sleep will be sweet.

If God, by the power of divine providence, made His children healthy, wealthy, and wise, and none was ever sick, and none ever died prematurely, many people would follow Christ from ulterior motives, or for a wrong reason. They would be in danger of working for the "*food which perishes*" instead of working for "*the food which endures to eternal life*" (John 6:27).

He does not promise to put us under a glass, and

insulate us from pain, and keep us from all accidents. He does promise that all things will work together for our good, if we love Him.

Two men are riding down the highway in their automobiles. One is a child of God, and the other is not. There is an accident; both men die; both lie cold and stiff on a marble slab; both are surrounded by friends who moan and grieve, and give vent to loud lamentations.

One, and only one, was kept from all evil by the sheltered wings of a living God.

Chapter 16

What Do The Lives Of Jesus, Peter, And Paul Teach About The Providence Of God?

Psm. 145:9-17; 33:13-15; Acts 17:24-28

Gary Colley

It is a pleasure and an honor to have the opportunity on this lectureship program to discuss the precious and comforting theme of the **Providence of God**. To be associated with these speakers who believe completely the teaching of the Bible on this theme leads to us the benefit of truth without admixtures of error, which builds in us the true "*substance*" that undergirds our eternal hope (Heb. 11:1). Gratitude is also extended to the Southaven church for seeing the need and hosting this lecture program.

Defining Providence

Though the word providence is used but once in the Scriptures (Acts 24:2) and that in reference to Paul, the Scriptures bearing on this subject are very numerous and of great comfort and strong force. The Greek word is *pronoia* and has the primary meaning of forethought. Impacted in the thought is the skill, vigilance, and prudence of the constant operation of God in the several parts of the universe. To be sure God takes part in all that happens among mankind by directing and overruling the whole course of events so as to make every one of them answer the designs of His wise and righteous judgment.

It is unlimited in scope, extending to all things and all creatures (Psm. 145:9-17). Paul wrote,

That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated (that all who would enter Christ might be saved, GC) according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will (Eph. 1:10-11).

Hence as a summation of God's providence we may say it is the act of providing which includes foresight, care for and interest in the affairs of the universe, preparation and a manifestation of God's provisions over His creatures as by a superior intelligent being.

An Important Word Of Caution

In the study of Bible teaching concerning the providence of God let it ever be basically understood that His working in providence now is always through natural law. It is not to be confused therefore, as many have erroneously supposed, with miracles or some "*direct guidance of the Lord.*" Sad it is to hear of even some in the church who go away from divine revelation in the Bible to mysticism, personal testifying, inner light theories, and subjectivism as they demand it seems something more than "*the perfect law of liberty*" (James 1:25). We must not forget that the Word has been confirmed by miracles (Heb. 2:1-4), after which they were removed (I Cor. 13:8-10), and that we are all now by the Scriptures "*thoroughly furnished unto all good works*" (II Tim. 3:16-17). Let us learn to be liberal only in the high reverence and respect for God's Word (Psm. 119:105, 129-130). Miracles demand the suspension of natural laws, are above and beyond natural laws, while providence always involves the use of natural laws. Though we certainly believe in and are dependent on the working of

God in our lives to direct and guide our course correctly, and not as we always may think is best in our limited vision, we must not presume or presumptuously think to tamper with nor dictate to the workings of God. It is ours to faithfully obey all of His commands (II Cor. 6:17-18). His part will be perfectly taken care of in providing and directing our course. We should not worry nor concern ourselves so much with when, where and how God's providence may work as that we should obey diligently His Work and seek to "*work out our own salvation with fear and trembling*" (Phil. 2:12-16). Since it is the Lord's promise that He "*will never leave us nor forsake us*" (Heb. 13:5-6), we should go diligently about our work, trusting all the while in His providential care! He will no doubt be "*able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power (Gospel GC) that worketh in us*" (Eph. 3:20). And with Paul we say, "*Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen*" (Eph. 3:21).

Our Worthy Example, Jesus Christ

From the life and teaching of our Lord and Saviour we learn much about the providence of God both in prosperity and adversity! We see in the life of Christ that though God promises to provide all that we need (Heb. 4:16) and teaches us to trust His care, He may sometimes put us on trial while at other times He will give us victory in defeat. But we can and must trust Him at all times and be satisfied without knowing all the particulars of how, when, and why. In His providence of favor and joy we may always say with David, "*He prepareth a table before me in the presence of mine enemies*" (Psm. 23:5)

The Extent Of Providence

Jesus taught that beings of seemingly only slight importance are regarded by the care of the infinite God.

Behold the birds of the heaven, that they sow not,

neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, and your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are not ye of much more value than they? (Matt. 6:26).

To build confidence in us to act responsibly in the present and have hope for the future, the fowls of the air are shown to be in the providence of God. God does not feed them in idleness, but though they do not labor as we do, their wants are supplied abundantly, regularly, and cheerfully by the hand of God! Surely if God gives the birds their needs though they are small and insignificant, He will care for His people who are the faithful servants in His kingdom, with particularly special love and care. Jesus continues,

Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow;...Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, **if God so clothe the grass of the field**, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, **shall he not much more clothe you**, O ye of little faith? (Matt. 6:28-30).

Hereby Jesus supports His charge,

Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?...Which of you, by taking thought, can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment?" (Matt. 6:25, 27, 28a).

To "*take no thought*" in the Greek language is a strong expression, "*be not distraught by many cares.*" Assuredly, if the weakness and seeming helplessness of the birds is so ordered by providence as to carry out God's care for them, we have the strong assurance that His providence will even more so order and arrange the circumstances of our lives and needs here below. Our Lord believed in the complete care of God for himself. By His example and teaching, He taught us to see our obvious duty of "*leaning on the everlasting arm,*" depending on Him to provide for and preserve our lives.

Our lives are then to exemplify the fullest life of trust, gratitude, patience, and hope. We are taught not to have undue anxiety over the provisions of this life as we cast all our cares on Him, knowing that Jehovah *“will sustain thee: he will never suffer the righteous to be moved”* (Psm. 55:22). That which our Lord would have us to understand about our daily attitude of dependence is found in the manner in which He taught His disciples to pray, *“Give us this day our daily bread”* (Matt. 6:9-11). The song writer expresses the exact teaching of our Lord in the song, *“Be not dismayed what'er betide, God will take care of you.”*

Submission And Obedience In The Life Of Jesus

Precluding His personal ministry by about eighteen years, Jesus as a lad was left in Jerusalem by his parents. They had traveled a day's journey all the while thinking Jesus was with the kinsfolk in travel. Three days later his parents found Him in the temple astonishing the doctors of the law and with His wisdom. It seems that His parents had sought in many different places for Him, since He said when they found Him,

How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must
be about my Fathers business?" (Luke 2:4-52).

Even at this young age, Jesus knew His duty and His Father's providential care.

Jesus recognized that it was His responsibility to obey the Father in all things and to trust Him for His care. What better example of submission and obedience could be shown than when He walked sixty miles to be baptized in order that He might *“fulfill all righteousness”* (Matt. 3:13-17)? How evident was the witness of His Father to that event in the voice from Heaven which said, *“This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”* Jesus taught His disciples, then and now, that we must deny self (Matt. 16:24) and Paul states about the Saviour

of the world, *“For even Christ pleased not himself”* (Rom. 15:3). He faithfully worshipped the Father and was ready to serve when being called upon to read in the assembly (Luke 4:16). He taught us to worship God and not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together (Matt. 4:10; Heb. 10:25). Prayer had a great and important part in His life, especially when He prepared for any great crisis or important work. Before selecting the apostles *“He continued all night in prayer to God”* (Luke 6:12-13). When under extreme sorrow and agony in the garden of Gethsemane, three times He prayed fervently unto the Father (Matt. 26:35-46).

Knowing The Father’s Care

Our Lord had said before His death,

He that sent me is with me; he hath not left me alone
for I do always the things that are pleasing to him
(John 8:29).

Without doubt, Jesus realized what He was saying when He taught,

But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his
righteousness; and all these things shall be added
unto you (Matt. 6:33).

And he had John to write,

And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him because
we keep his commandments, and do those things
that are pleasing in his sight (I John 3:22).

What earthly father does not delight to provide to the fullest the needs, desires, and requests of the faithful, loving, obedient child? With tender care and a watchful eye this child has every reason to know love, protection, and provisions to the fullest extent of the father’s ability and opportunity (Prov. 15:8)! God’s people should know that they hold a peculiar relation to their Father (Rom. 8:16-17) that caused the writer John by inspiration to

exclaim,

Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God (I John 3:1).

Our relation to God, as His people, is above and beyond the care of all the works of His creation, being the special objects of His love and care. The purposes of God are independent and eternal, and are certain to be carried out (Isa. 55:6-11).

Peter's Life Extols God's Providence

Who could fail to see the providence of God in the life of one so great as the apostle Peter? The exercise of God's care continually on all of His creatures can be wonderfully seen, but in particular in this recipient of the "*keys of the kingdom of heaven*" (Matt. 16:19), who first preached God's power of salvation to both the Jews and the Gentiles, giving for all times the plan of salvation in the terms of faith, repentance, and baptism (Acts 2:38-39; 10:34-35, 48).

Early Life Of Peter

We first know of Peter as an humble fisherman on the Sea of Tiberias (Matt. 4:18; Mark 1:16) who became, with his brother Andrew, a disciple of John the Baptist. When Jesus first saw Peter He said,

Thou art Simon, the son of Jonas; thou shalt be called Cephas (John 1:36-42).

Later Jesus was teaching a throng of people on the Sea of Galilee and boarded Peter's boat to thrust out a little from the shore so that He might effectively teach. Following this, there was the miracle of the great catch of fish, though until the Lord gave His command they had fished all night and caught none. It was at this point that Peter and Andrew accepted the Lord's invitation to

become “*fishers of men,*” “*And they straightway left their nets, and followed him*” (Matt. 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:1-11).

Peter Sees Jesus’ Miracles

He witnessed many of the miracles of the Lord including the raising of the dead of Jairus’s daughter (Mark 5:22, 37), the healing of his wife’s mother (Matt. 8:14-15), and his own walk for a while on the surface of the tempest, after which in the boat he proclaimed, “*Of a truth thou art the Son of God*” (Matt. 14:25-33). Hence he was thoroughly convinced of Jesus being the Messiah (John 20:30-31) so that when Jesus asked all the disciples, “*But whom say ye that I am?*” Peter promptly replied,

Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matt. 16:13-19).

Jesus answered

Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church.

That same confession must be made by all today for salvation and for acknowledgement before the Father in the great day of judgment (Rom. 10:9-10; Matt. 10:32-33).

What Shall We Have?

Peter was so close to the Lord and loved Him so much that he considered he could ask anything of the Lord and knew the Lord would respond. He declared one time to the Lord that

....we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?

Jesus' answer that “*in the regeneration*” which pointed to the time from Pentecost and the authority of the apostles (“*thrones*”) when they would make known the

way of life, they would additionally be blessed with receiving “*an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life*” (Matt. 19:27-29). Mark’s account comments on the “*hundredfold*” as being

...in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life (Mark 10:28-30).

When we lose one friend for serving Christ or perhaps a house, God in His providence may give us a hundred welcomes in the faithful homes of our brethren.

In Trials And Persecutions

Our Father knows about our persecutions, trials and temptations. Jesus warned Peter and prayed for him when he was to be tempted of Satan:

Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee (Luke 22:31-32).

Though Peter did grievously sin in denying his Lord three times and went out to weep bitterly when the Lord gave the convicting glance, he repented, and later acknowledged his love three times in response to the Lord’s questions, “*Lovest thou me?*” It was this Peter who later wrote,

The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished (II Peter 2:9).

He had known the providence of God in the help he received, to triumph above every trial and persecution, that the godly may have the victory by faithful service.

Making Our Salvation Sure

He also knew the conditions by which men can keep from falling, in the providence of God. Using “*the keys of*

the kingdom” to teach how to remain faithful, He said we must add to our lives diligently: faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. This pattern of life would make our

....calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall (II Peter 1:5-11).

Latter Life Of Peter

And again, no more beautiful and meaningful words for the Christian can be found anywhere than when Peter, from the viewpoint of being

....an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed (I Peter 5:1).

writes,

Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you (I Peter 5:5-7).

Having known God’s care through many joyful and sorrowful days, Peter wanted us to know the providence of God that is always near when faith and trust are unswerving in our gracious Father and that continuing faithful we shall receive the end, object, and aim of our faith, “*even the salvation of our souls*” (I Peter 1:9).

God’s Providence In The Life Of Paul

Since we have no way of knowing God’s acts of providence except by looking back on events, it is important that we keep this principle in mind in our study. One-fifth of the book of Genesis is devoted to the life of Joseph and God’s care for him. Joseph’s brothers were not cognizant of the intents of God’s plan when carrying out their envy, jealousy, and hatred in selling

into bondage their brother Joseph. But after twenty-two years in Egypt, under some very severe circumstances, Joseph could say to his brothers in retrospect,

I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. And now be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life ... God sent me before you to preserve you ... So now it is not you that sent me hither, but God... (Gen. 45:4-8).

Paul Looks Back

The life of Paul affords many of the same reminders from the past. In Galatians 1:15, Paul states that God

....separated me from my mother's womb and called me by his grace.

Throughout the life of Paul he constantly looked back and gave glory to God for His providence which made him what he was, a preacher and an apostle. No man ever believed more strongly in the providence of God than Paul. He always considered God to be the source of his work and blessings. To the Corinthians he wrote,

But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I but the grace of God which was with me (I Cor. 15:10).

As if to speak from the virtual to the actual Paul could in retrospect see God's hand throughout his birth, his growing up years in Tarsus, his training at the feet of Gamaliel, and his "*being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions*" and teachings of the law of Moses, as parts of the divine intentions concerning the future of his life and work. Having written perhaps fourteen of the books of the New Testament and carrying out untold numbers of preaching toils with great sufferings, Paul could look back to see God's providential design for his

life as an instrument of righteousness.

Paul Knew God's Continual Care

When describing the troubles that came to him in Asia, he pointed out clearly once again the providence of God. Paul knew God's care in three senses, which he expressed in three tenses in II Corinthians 1:9-10, where he wrote,

But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: who **delivered us** from so great a death, and **doth deliver**: in whom we trust that he **will yet deliver us**.

Paul considered himself and his fellow-workers many times condemned to die without any hope of being acquitted! His feeling under the heavy envy and hatred of his enemies was that death was imminent without seeing any means of escape. His suffering was not for wrongdoing, but because he was preaching Christ and Him crucified (I Cor. 2:2). Yet each of these experiences confirmed the thought in his mind "*that we should not trust in ourselves*" (II Cor. 1:9) or any human aid, but in God who had the power to save from whatever difficulty might arise.

Paul's Devoted Life

He kept ever before his mind,

For none of us liveth to (for G.C.) himself, and no man dieth to (for G.C.) himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's (Rom. 14:7-8).

It is abundantly evident that Paul, who had been "*crucified with Christ*" (Gal. 2:20), put his complete confidence in God and trusted His hand to conduct him through life. In the past tense when Paul had known the

frightful threat of death, he states *“who delivered us;”* while in the present tense he says *“and doth deliver”* or preserve us, showing that God preserved them constantly; and in the third tense in an exclamation of hope he says, *“In whom we trust that he will yet deliver us”* (II Cor. 1:10). To the end of his life filled with perilous danger, Paul saw the mighty hand of God as his deliverer all the way! In his defense before Agrippa, he described his unusual life and the great change which he had made to Christianity. He rehearsed the commission given to him by the Lord (Acts 26:16-18), along with the assurance that God’s providence would deliver him as he continued obedient to Heaven’s will. He then says to Agrippa that his preaching of the Gospel was the cause for which *“the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me”* (Acts 26:21). Then he points out to Agrippa the real source of his continuance under such difficult circumstances by saying,

Having therefore obtained help by God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come (Acts 26:22).

The great faith and strength of Paul were all traceable to the powerful Gospel and his confidence in the providence of God!

Paul’s Superior Strength

He knew the great strength of his enemies which was pressed upon him in their malice, purposing to take his life. He had observed and understood his danger. But he knew more the power of the strength of God and His providence. Therefore he continued to preach faithfully the pure, unadulterated Gospel of Christ without adding to or taking from, knowing that it was the only power by which the inhabitants of the earth could be saved (Rom. 1:16-17). The providence of God was the undergirding of

Paul's ability to perform such far-reaching work with such terrific trials ever pressing him. Knowing the Lord's care was always his, he wrote the Philippians,

I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content ... I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me (Phil. 4:11-13).

That Timothy might know the source of his success, Paul wrote concerning his suffering as a preacher and apostle,

For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day (II Tim. 1:12).

If God Be For Us

As we have seen Paul and the fact that he "*learned*" to bear all with a contented mind, let us set about to learn the same. If we ever feel ourselves weak and doubtful in this life, let us read again Paul's strengthening words in Romans 8:31-39. Then when our frail tabernacle is folded here below, we can know with him, that we have fought a good fight ... finished our course ... and kept the faith. Likewise, that the crown laid up for all who love His appearing will then be given to us by the righteous judge (II Tim. 4:6-8). He has walked with us as a kind, gentle, protecting Father and Shepherd (John 10; Psm. 23). The hope of heaven which we have entertained through the difficulties of this life, with the providence of God, will then be a splendrous reality!

What Are The Main Differences Between “General Providence” And “Special Providence”?

Mac Deaver

Introduction

The subject of *“providence”* is an extremely interesting and challenging one and certainly deserving of much thought. Our English word *“providence”* is derived from the word *“provide,”* and in that word we see the basic notion contained. In reference to God then, providence has to do with God’s provisions for us; providence entails all arrangements that God has made to see to it that His ultimate will is done, and as that ultimate will involves those beings who are made in His image, His providence insures that certain features will always be characteristic of this world in regard to those beings.

In Matthew 6:10 the Saviour prayed,

...Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth.

Of course not everything done pleases God. It is not God’s will that anyone sin. But God has a will that even encompasses this situation so that ultimately His will will be done. The divine program will be carried out, and no one in heaven, on earth, or in hades can prevent it.

Now since the providence of God with which we are particularly concerned has to do with man, and since

man has free will, it will always be somewhat puzzling to us as to how to properly integrate divine providence with human free action. The Bible affirms that somehow there can be that integration (Acts 2:23). But the Bible nowhere explains exactly how God can bring such about. This aspect of providence is indeed complicated. In commenting on Acts 2:17-18 the learned J. W. McGarvey said (particularly with regard to the sovereignty of God and the free agency of man),

If any man can frame a theory by which to philosophically reconcile these two facts, we will assent to it, if we can understand it; but unless both facts, unaltered, have a place in the theory, we must reject it. (**Commentary on Acts**, p. 53).

If you have wrestled with this element of providence, perhaps you can appreciate brother McGarvey's point.

The procedure that I will employ in this lesson by which I will attempt to answer the question which is the title of the lesson is first to discuss what is involved in general providence. By doing such, I think we can finally arrive at the distinction that obtains between the two.

Discussion

First of all, let us consider several elements involved in **general providence**.

God has made man and the world in such a way that man can be sustained in this life. Paul affirmed in Athens that it is in God that we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28). Sustenance is possible because God is in control, and He has seen to it that as far as creation is concerned, there is no deficiency in the program which could possibly cast aspersions upon God.

The opportunities available for sustaining oneself are not simply available to those who seek to do God's will, but they are also available (and sometimes greatly utilized) to those who have no interest whatever in things spiritual (Job 21:17-26). In fact, many, if not most, of

those who have become exceedingly wealthy in this life have been those who have displayed little interest in the cause of truth.

Another element involved in general providence is the weather. And this point overlaps the first. But with regard to the weather at least two things ought to be said. First, God gives weather that is conducive to sustenance. The sunshine and the rain come to all men whether good or bad (Matt. 5:45). And God sees to it that the earth is cared for in a way that he alone can administer (Job 37:13a). And secondly, God gives weather that is conducive to reflection and meditation upon man's part. The orderliness of the weather and the cycles that display its varied possibilities should cause men to reflect upon the God who made it as it is (cf. Gen. 8:22; Acts 14:17; Psm. 19:1; Job 37:6, 7, 13). According to the passage from Job just referred to, God can use the weather to close down or terminate earthly activity and give men time and circumstance in which to reflect upon God.

A third element involved in general providence is civil government. God has, in His infinite wisdom, provided for the care and keeping of mankind in society. He has provided for the protection of the innocent and for the prosecution of the guilty (Rom. 13:1-7). And somehow, God is able to work out His will in and through the various governments of the earth. In fact, the Bible plainly affirms that God is the one who gives the kingdoms of the earth to whomsoever He will (Dan. 4:25). When human governments go so far away from God that they no longer serve the basic purpose for which they were allowed to exist, God knows how to punish them and/or eliminate them (Isa. 24:21). But men in society need regulation. Someone must be in control. Someone must make decisions for the good of the state. God has given that role to government.

A fourth element in general providence is the possibility of good relationships of a domestic sort. God has provided the home (Gen. 2:18-25). And all people at

some time in their lives have a right to a home. And even persons who unfortunately may not care about God, still may have access to home and family. Of course, some people forfeit the right to marriage (Matt. 19:9). A wife is a blessing from God (Prov. 18:22; 19:14), and children are said to be a heritage from Jehovah (Psm. 127:3). Such relationships are ingredients in the proper environment for mankind.

A fifth element in general providence is composed of time and chance. That is, in God's total program for the wellbeing of mankind, there is an element of "*randomness*." In the overall desire of things, there is included an area which is in a sense "*unrestricted*" in that at a given moment at least two options (situations) are open to a person either one of which is beyond his own ability to regulate. In Ecclesiastes 9:11 Solomon observed,

I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favor to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.

A person whom we would describe as "*lucky*" is one who has experienced fortunate chance, and a person whom we would describe as "*unlucky*" is one who has experienced unfortunate chance. Of course, God's special providence can incorporate either fortunate chance or unfortunate chance, but we do not want to fail to notice that these are really existing features of the real world in which God has made provisions for man.

Secondly, let us now consider some aspects of **special providence**.

First of all, God will help arrange circumstances so that those who want the truth can find it. In Proverbs 1:20-33 wisdom cries out to be heard. And it is there affirmed that those who reject wisdom will one day in distress cry out for its help, but at that point wisdom will

merely mock at the calamity. Again, in Proverbs 8:17 wisdom personified says,

I love them that love me; And those that seek me
diligently shall find me.

In Matthew 7:7-11 the Lord told us to ask, seek, and knock with the result promised that something would be given to us, we would find something, and that something would be opened to us. In Luke 11:13 Jesus said.

If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts
unto your children, how much more shall your
heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask
him?

It is not without significance to note that (1) one calls on the name of the Lord in baptism (Acts 22:16), and that (2) the reception of the Holy Spirit is promised to one who is baptized (Acts 2:38), and that (3) the Holy Spirit will be given to those who ask for it (Luke 11:13). Thus, we conclude that those who genuinely ask, seek, and knock at salvation's door will be given entrance that they may have what they most want.

Further, it might be observed just here that (1) man is made to look for God (Acts 17:27), and (2) God is not far from any man (Acts 17:27), and (3) God wants all men to find Him (II Peter 3:9; I Tim. 2:4), and (4) God will assist that genuinely searching man in finding truth (Matt. 7:7ff). Therefore, one is left with the conclusion that when a soul departs this life in an unprepared state, it is because he did not desire saving truth.

Second, angels are somehow involved in assisting those who are on their way to glory. In Hebrews 1:14 they are said to be ministering servants who are working in behalf of those who shall inherit salvation. And the "*little ones*" of Matthew 18:10 have angels who are before the Father. And in Luke 16:22 we learn that the righteous are attended in death by angels. We do not with the eye observe the assistance rendered, but such is given (cf.

II Kings 6:16-17).

Third, in special providence God keeps His promises with regard to security. In His word, God has promised those who put righteousness first in their lives that they will be, by Him taken care of with physical sustenance (Matt. 6:33; Psm. 37:25). It is true that the wicked may have more money than the righteous have, but the righteous have the promise of security that the wicked do not have. God in His providence will make sure that those who love Him most of all will be by Him maintained in this life. The wicked at times prosper (Job 21:7-16), but it is without the promise of security. The righteous are sometimes not as well off as the wicked (James 2:6), but they know that God will maintain them. Too, the righteous are secured spiritually. God will keep His promises with regard to saving eternally those who obeyed Him in this life (Matt. 25:46; Rev. 14:13). God will save all such unto His heavenly kingdom (II tim. 4:8, 18).

Four, in His special providence God will bless others because of His faithful ones. Many times in the Bible one can read of a given person's being blessed in some way because of someone else. At times God would send certain blessings to people because of "*David's sake*," or He might benefit someone for his own sake (I Kings 11:12; Deut. 4:21; Isa. 48:9). Just so it is the case that many persons receive special favor or blessing from God because of righteous persons they are connected with or associated with. As God's people are the light of the world, others receive the benefit of that light (Matt. 5:14). And as God's people are the salt of the earth, others are blessed by that preserving influence (Matt. 5:13). Thus, many are favored by their association with or their connection with the righteous in a way that they would not be if they had no relationship with the righteous (Prov. 14:34). This same point is being made in I Corinthians 7:14 which has been a somewhat troubling passage to many. Paul affirmed,

For the unbelieving husband is sanctified in the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified in the brother: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy.

Somehow in God's providence the unbeliever will be blessed in a way he would not have been had he not been in the relationship with the believer that he was. And the children of this union will be favored by God especially because of the Christian parent in that home. God is working through members of the church to His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13).

Conclusion

Having now discussed several elements in both general and special providence, perhaps we are able to distinguish between the two kinds of providence at this time. There does seem to be some overlapping between the two, and yet a distinction can be drawn.

In both kinds of providence, God is keeping His word. He is keeping promises He has made with regard to the welfare of mankind. But generally speaking, in general providence we have reference to those situations which are particularly designed for the good of man in this life. And in special providence we have reference to those arrangements or situations that have been designed particularly for the good of man's soul.

Nowhere in the Bible does God attempt to explain to us the "*mechanics*" of a miracle. And nowhere in the Bible does He attempt to explain the exact intricacies of providence. He simply declares the reality of providence, and with such an affirmation we must be satisfied, and for such providence we must be grateful.

Chapter 18

What Does The Life Of Noah Teach About The Providence Of God?

Paul Sain

Eternity only will reveal the great good that will be accomplished by this, the first **POWER** lectureship, and the beginning of the **POWER** journal. So many are indebted to brethren Thomas B. Warren and Garland Elkins, for their influence and instruction received through the years, in so many ways (written and oral). Our sincere gratitude is likewise expressed to the Southaven eldership and congregation. To accept the challenge and bring to reality this great work is so commendable.

The all-powerful, all-knowing, everywhere-present Almighty God created the world (Gen. 1:1ff). He placed Adam and Eve in the beautiful Garden and provided for their every need. But (as even today man is prone to be) they were not content with the rich provisions, and accepting the only restriction. They sinned in eating the forbidden fruit, and thus were driven from the Garden. With the passing of time, the existence of man upon the earth became more and more sinful, even to the point that it caused God to sorrow that He had even created man. God decreed that He would destroy all living things, *“from man unto beast.”*

This brief overview of the creation, and sin entering, and God’s decree brings us to our study in this lesson. The destruction of all living things was not to bring the

human race to an end because, God was in control. His Divine providence had always, presently is, and will always take care of those who love Him and follow His instructions. Thus,

Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord (Gen. 6:8).

Concerning this statement, Keil and Delitzsch state, *“In these words mercy is seen in the midst of wrath, pledging the preservation and restoration of humanity.”*

The word *“providence”* (from the Latin *providere*) which means etymologically *“to foresee.”* (International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, p. 2476). In relationship to God’s providential hand with Noah (as well as other Biblical characters, and you and I) the *ISBE* further states accurately,

While all rational beings exercise a providence proportioned to their powers, yet it is only when the word is used with reference to the Divine Being who is possessed of infinite knowledge and power that it takes on its real and true significance. The doctrine of Divine providence, therefore, has reference to that preservation, care and government which God exercises over all things that He has created, in order that they may accomplish the ends for which they were created.

The narratives of the Old Testament provide us with information concerning man’s origin, his reactions to the instructions given by God, and his present purpose of living, and his future. Without such historical information we would otherwise struggle to *“fill in the blanks.”* Let us ever be so thankful for the accounts concerning Adam and Eve, Moses, Abraham, Noah and many others. Our God is so wonderful to provide all that we need (II Peter 1:3; II Tim. 3:16-17).

Brother Joe Gilmore, in **The Book of Genesis**, (1985 Spiritual Sword Lectureship) states how providence aided Noah:

Noah was saved by the good providence of God in the ark. It was not a scheme of his own devising. When the ark was built it was not near a seaport. There was no water at hand where a craft of this size could float. The ark was not a ship. It was like a box, there was no mast, sail, or rudder. The ark was made to float and not to sail!

No wonder the people chided the builder. But it was God's way for saving souls, and not the way the wisdom of the world would have chosen. The plan of God today to save a self-ruined race comes from heaven. It is not a product coming from earth. Man would never have thought of a plan to save himself through gospel obedience as is set forth in Mark 16:16.

Let us notice a brief picture of Noah and related facts concerning his place in history and the involvement of God's providential hand, as presented in key Scriptures:

And Lamech ... begat a son: And he called his name Noah, saying, This same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil (Gen. 5:28-29).

And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast ... for it repenteth me that I have made them. But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord ... Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God (Gen. 6:5-9).

And God said unto Noah ... I will destroy them with the earth (Gen. 6:13).

Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch. And this is the fashion which thou shalt make it of: The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, the breadth of it fifty cubits, and the

height of it thirty cubits. A window shalt thou make to the ark ... and the door ... with lower, second, and third stories shalt thou make it. And, behold, I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh ... and every thing that is in the earth shall die. But with thee will I establish my covenant; and thou shalt come into the ark, thou, and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons' wives with thee (Gen. 6:14-18).

Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he (Gen. 6:22).

And the Lord said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation (Gen. 7:1).

And Noah did according unto all that the Lord commanded him. And Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of waters was upon the earth (Gen. 7:5-6).

...as God had commanded Noah (Gen. 7:9b)

In the six hundredth year of Noah's life ... the same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened. And the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights (Gen. 7:11-12).

...as God had commanded him, and the Lord shut him in (Gen. 7:16).

And the flood was forty days upon the earth; and the waters increased, and bare up the ark, and it was lift up above the earth. And the waters prevailed, and were increased greatly upon the earth; and the ark went upon the face of the waters. And the waters prevailed exceedingly upon the earth; and all the high hills, that were under the whole heaven, were covered. Fifteen cubits upward did the waters prevail; and the mountains were covered (Gen. 7:17-20).

And the waters prevailed upon the earth an hundred and fifty days (Gen. 7:24).

And God remembered Noah, and every living thing ... and God made wind to pass over the earth, and the waters assuaged; (Gen. 8:1).

And the ark rested ... upon the mountains of Ararat And it came to pass at the end of forty days, that Noah opened the window of the ark which he had made And it came to pass ... the waters were dried up from off the earth: and Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and, behold, the face of the ground was dry (Gen. 4,6,13).

And God spake unto Noah, saying, Go forth of the ark, thou, and thy wife, and thy sons, and thy sons' wives with thee (Gen. 8:16).

And Noah builded an altar unto the Lord; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And the Lord smelled a sweet savour; and the Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; (Gen. 8:20-21a)

And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth (Gen. 9:1).

And God spake unto Noah, and to his sons ... I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you And I will establish my covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth. And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations; I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth (Gen. 9:8-9, 11-13).

And all the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years; and he died (Gen. 9:29).

Our outline, the six main points, for this study shall

- be:
- I. Noah, a righteous man, and his family.
 - II. God's warning and instructions to Noah.

- III. Noah builds the ark – a difficult task.
- IV. The flood.
- V. After the flood.
- VI. Summary: What can we learn from all this?

I. Noah – A Righteous Man

Noah was the tenth in descent from Adam; the son of Lamech (Gen. 5:28-29); the grandson of Methusaleh. Lamech called his son's name Noah because "*This name shall comfort us.*" We have nothing concerning Noah's life until he is 500 years old, at which time he begat three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth.

In the New Testament, Peter refers to Noah as a "*preacher of righteousness*" (II Peter 2:5). Righteousness consists in doing right (I John 3:7). Noah was the first man in Genesis who is called righteous.

The Hebrew writer simply calls him a man of faith,

By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith (Heb. 11:7).

In a world of total wickedness, Noah and his family were able to live righteously. Even though he preached the message of God, with no visible results outside of his own family, according to the information we have, he was steadfast and faithful in the sight of God by saving his own family.

The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous and his ears are open unto their cry and the Lord delivereth them out of all their trouble (Psm. 34:15-17).

God provided a way for any who would do so, to be righteous. God has always made it possible for each one to do His will. Though it may be difficult, it is possible to follow God; to live soberly, righteously and godly in this world (Titus 2:11-12). We may live in an "*untoward*

generation" (Acts 2:40) even as those of the first century, but if we will follow the way of our Savior, we can be saved.

Noah underwent a great trial. Not only living daily in a wicked world, but also in the daily obedience to the will of the Father. We often think of Abraham being tested and tried concerning the command of God to offer his son as a sacrifice. Or we might recall the trials of Job, in the loss of material wealth, his family, everything. In a similar manner, Noah was tried. He daily faced trials and temptations. He proved faithful to the Creator.

Noah was a worshipper of God (Gen. 8:20-21). After leaving the ark, he built an altar (Gen. 8:20-21), to give praise to his heavenly Father.

As we have noticed in the flurry of Scripture citations previously, Noah was an obedient man (Gen. 6:22; 7:5; Heb. 11:7). He did as God commanded. Our salvation is likewise conditional on our obedience to our Master (Heb. 5:8-9).

Quite interesting it is to notice how involved our heavenly Father was in the account of Noah and the flood. Notice that God gave instructions; God promised to establish a covenant; God gave Noah seven days to get in the ark; God made a wind to pass over the earth; and God made a covenant with Noah.

II. God's Warning And Instructions To Noah

Because of the wickedness that existed, God is sorry that he created man. The wickedness was deplorable. Clarke's Commentary gives the following description:

What an awful character does God give of the inhabitants of the antediluvian world! 1. They were flesh, (ver. 3), wholly sensual, the desires of the mind overwhelmed and lost in the desires of the flesh, their souls no longer discerning their high destiny, but ever minding earthly things, so that they

were sensualized, brutalized, and become flesh; incarnated so as not to retain God in their knowledge, and they lived, seeking their portion in this life. 2. They were in a state of wickedness. All was corrupt within, and all unrighteous without Piety was gone, and every form of sound words had disappeared. (Clarke's Commentary, p. 69).

The decision was made! In a similar way that God told Abraham of the destruction of Sodom (Gen. 8:17-18), He now tells Noah of the destruction coming to the wicked (Gen. 6:13). He informs Noah of this decision and gives Noah the opportunity to save himself and his family, by hearing the warning and responding to it. Notice how similar it is to the warning we have received from God and how we likewise must hear, and respond appropriately to it. God has always instructed His people in the way that He desired them to go (Heb. 1:1-2).

God will destroy the earth, all living things, with the exception of the righteous Noah and his family. Why was Noah to be spared? Because of his righteousness! Because Noah still held in esteem, God and God's way. Because he was perfect in his generation, *"in all things a consistent character, never departing from the truth in principle or practice"* (Clarke). Not only was Noah right with his fellow man, but far more importantly, he was right with God, reflected in the reference to the fact that he *"walked with God."*

III. Noah Builds The Ark – A Difficult Task

How wonderful to read (more than once) that "Noah followed God's commands, exactly as God specified!" He built the ark, to the saving of himself and his family.

The exact shape of the ark is unknown, but the dimensions are given. According to the Scriptures, God instructed Noah to build the ark 300 cubits in length, 50 cubits in breadth, and 30 cubits in height. The exact measurement of a cubit is not known, because it was

relative to the length from the tip of the middle finger to the elbow (which varies with individuals). An accepted length (one within the minimum and maximum lengths) is twenty one inches. Assuming the cubit was twenty one inches, the ark would have been 525 feet in length, 87 1/2 feet in breadth and 52 1/2 in height. Would it be large enough? Many have given great study to whether each of the animals, and the approximate needed space, could even go in such a vessel; but again God took care of this! He is all-knowing! He providentially took care of the needs of Noah and his family.

Where were all the supplies, the awesome quantity of gopher wood (most likely cypress) secured? The answer simplified – God did not instruct them to do something that would not be possible. He provided for them – as He fully and completely supplies our every need.

Don't you know that Noah (as well as his three sons) grew weary of such a difficult task? It wasn't raining when Noah built the ark! Thus, there was no evidence of the definite event taking place. Thus, after ten, twenty or maybe **fifty years** – would we not (if we had been in their place) have had second thoughts about the whole matter? But let us remember: God's hand was in it all.

The providence of God is often difficult to fully understand (especially at the time). We don't always see how God uses an occasion to bring about His will. Noah likely did not understand why the wicked all around him prospered and seemingly he and his family were suffering greatly. Noah possibly could have inquired, as did Gideon,

If the Lord be with us why then is all this befallen us
(Judges 6:13)?

Can we adequately imagine the day-to-day response of the neighbors and friends (?) of Noah and his family? The ridicule (the human nature of wicked ones) that many imposed on them had to be enormous. Such

mocking and ridicule, no doubt, began soon after the framework of the ark was in place, indicating the gigantic size, and then likely continued until the flood – over one hundred years! What faith! What commitment! What obedience to the heavenly Father!

IV. The Flood

Many have witnessed the raging waters of a flood. In Jackson, Missouri a few years ago when the home in which we lived flooded, almost seven feet of water in the first floor. Recently in Pulaski, Tennessee, residents suffered when over five inches of rain in a brief few hours flooded large areas of land and many homes. While these occurrences bring to our mind the small scale *flood* – our heavenly Father flooded the entire earth! To speak of this flood as partial is absurd. Questions have been asked and answers pursued concerning whether this flood was a “*universal*” or merely a “*localized*” flood. Let us accept the Biblical truths concerning this account of God’s destruction of wicked man. The Scriptural account is surely plain enough, for which we clearly can understand:

...the waters prevailed exceedingly upon the earth; and all the high hills, that were under the whole heaven, were covered. Fifteen cubits upward did the waters prevail; and the mountains were covered (Gen. 7:19-20).

The Lord provides us with a rather detailed picture of the flood, in Genesis 7:17-24. The waters increased with such force; raining forty days and forty nights and bursting forth of the fountains beneath the earth, until it was 15 cubits above all the lofty mountains of the earth. The All-powerful God demonstrated His power in this flood of all floods.

God providentially (through miraculous and non-miraculous means) accomplished what He stated He would do: destroy the wickedness upon the earth!

Many thoughts could be expressed at this point as to the hand of God in the care of the ark, during the time Noah and his family were inside; or the animals and how Noah was able to get them inside, and keep them under control while inside; also after the waters receded, the birds that were sent out, and the message they brought back to Noah — God’s hand was in it all.

V. After The Flood

The first thing Noah did was build an altar (Gen. 8:20-21) for burnt sacrifice to express his thanksgiving to his heavenly Father for the watchful protection bestowed upon his family during this year and ten days in the ark. The altar, a place for the offering of slain animals, is mentioned here for the first time in the Bible. There is no record of the sons of Adam building an altar for their offerings. Noah took his offerings from every clean beast and every clean fowl.

Noah and his family was sent forth by Jehovah to be *“fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth”* (Gen. 9:1).

Noah died at the age of 950 years (Gen. 9:28-29).

VI. Summary: What Can We Learn From All This?

Without the righteousness of Noah and his family would the human race have ceased to exist with the universal destructive flood? Similar questions could be considered concerning Judas and his betrayal of the Lord; Eve and sin entering into the world; etc. While we have not attempted to explore each action and circumstance – we know that God’s providential hand controls all things – which included Noah and his family and the preservation of the human race! It was not God’s plan for the human race to cease as a result of the universal flood. It was God’s plan to destroy the wicked.

We learn that **when we live by God’s instruction,**

following the way that is righteous – we will be triumphant! God will take care of His own (Rom. 8:1-39). We see in Noah and his family God’s loving, caring, providential hand meeting their every need. The great and good God is also our God today.

We learn that **regardless how wicked others may be, we can obey God** and follow His way. God will not allow us to be tempted above that we are able to bear (I Cor. 10:13). We will be tempted (James 1:12), but can know that we can be victorious (I Cor. 15:57).

We learn that at times **circumstances around us may seem “ungetoverable”**, but with God all things are possible, when it is His will and we follow Him (Matt. 7:21). When we are troubled, God will provide a way of escape.

We learn that a **“preacher of righteousness” does not have to be the dynamic, awesomely successful man** that gets many to respond to the invitation each service. Noah was considered to be a successful preacher (in the sight of God), when he saved his own household. Others heard the message he spoke, but refused to follow God’s way. Many today may hear, but refuse to follow!

We learn that **if we rebel against God’s way, and live in wickedness**, we will suffer the consequences. We will be punished, either in this life or in the eternal life to come. The wicked of Noah’s day likely felt confident that they knew what was best, and were all right, and were going to live out their life to the end *enjoying the pleasures of sin*. But such did not happen! We need to fully realize the following truths:

But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the Lord: and **be sure your sin will find you out** (Numbers 32:23). (Emp. mine, pls)

Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap (Gal. 6:7).

The wicked ones during the time of Noah received their

reward. Friends, if we live against the will of the Heavenly Father – we will also suffer the consequences!

A Few Additional Points To Consider:

Salvation Of Noah Is A True Likeness Of Salvation From Sin

Literally, the salvation of Noah is a type, a true likeness, of our salvation, an antitype, from sin. The flood waters bore the ark from the corrupt, wicked world to a purified world – so likewise today baptism takes us from the old man of sin to a new creature. Compare the reference in I Peter 3:20-21.

The Analogy Of The Ark Of Noah And The Church of Our Lord

How beautiful is the picture, similarities between the ark (in which Noah and his family were saved from the destructive flood), and the church (in which people today *can* be saved from the impending destruction). Notice:

One Ark

Gen. 6:14

One Door

Gen. 6:16

One Window

Gen. 6:16

One Kind of Material

Gen. 6:14

One Family

Gen. 7:7

Salvation Inside

I Peter 3:20

Destruction Outside

Gen. 7:23

One Church

Matt. 16:18; Col. 1:18

One Door

John 10:9; 14:6

One Light

Psm. 119:105

One Kind of Material

Acts 2:37-41, 47

One Family

Eph. 3:15; 1:22-23

Salvation Inside

Isa. 46:13; Heb. 12

Destruction Outside

II Thess. 1:7-9

Chapter 19

What About Providence As Related To Submissive And Rebellious Wills?

J. Noel Merideth

The “*providence*” of God refers to how God provides for man or His benevolent guidance in His provision of the affairs of the world. Providence is that continuous agency of God by which He moves the events of the world to fulfill the original design with which He created it. As creation explains the existence of the universe, and as preservation explains its continuance, so providence explains the progress of events. Psalm 103:19-20 says,

The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all. Bless the Lord, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word.

The Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou? (Dan. 4:32, 35).

Who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: that we should be to the praise of his glory (Eph. 1:11-12).

Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of

them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered (Matt. 10:29-30).

The providence of God does not destroy the free will of man as man is always free to obey God or he may choose to disobey. If man obeys God he becomes a part of God's great purpose for the triumph of righteousness. If man disobeys God he will suffer exposure and punishment.

The general providential government and control of God is over the universe at large; over the physical world; over the brute creation; over the outward success and failures of men's lives; and over man's birth and lot in life. His willingness to let men walk in their ways shows that God did not destroy their free will in life. But God

...left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness (Acts 14:17).

God in His providence will see that a sincere searcher for the truth will have an opportunity to know the will of God.

If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself (John 7:17).

The special providence of God is the care that God has for His people who obey Him and follow His commandments.

But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:19).

I Peter 3:10-12

For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile.

Peter is arguing that Christians should refrain from all wrongdoing and evil speaking, in order to be assured of the protection, approval and blessings of God. These words are a quote from the Old Testament (viz., Psm. 34:12-16). "*He that would love life*" is literally, "*he that willeth to love life.*" The "*good days*" are days of happiness, usefully and worthily spent. To enjoy such a life one must "*refrain*" his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking guile. "*Refrain*" is translated from *pauo* which means to cease, and implies a natural unruliness on the part of the tongue to utter evil things. The evil to be refrained from includes all perverse speaking and the guile is deceit.

Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it.

"*Eschew evil*" means to turn away from evil, it is from *ekklino* to bend away from, as one inclines himself in a narrow path to let another pass. The Christian must shun, avoid, and turn aside from all appearance of evil (I Thess. 5:22) and do only that which is good. He is to "*seek peace*" because in a world of war and strife it is not always easy to find and when seen we must hold on to it and this can be done only by diligent pursuit.

For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.

The preposition "*unto*" here means that God not only sees His people but blesses the needs He sees. The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous with approval and His ears are tuned to their supplications, but His face is against them that do evil.

He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination (Prov. 28:9).

Many years ago, before the turn of the century, J. W.

McGarvey preached two great sermons on divine providence. The first concerned Joseph of the Old Testament. Near the end of the sermon, after telling the life of Joseph in detail, he made this summary:

So then, this long story is told as an illustration of the providence of God, by which he can bring about his purposes....The man who studies the story of Joseph and does not see this in it, has failed to see one of its great purposes. And what is true in bringing about this result in the family of Jacob, may be true – I venture to say, it is true – in regard to every family of any importance in this world; and it extends down to the modes by which God overrules our own acts, both good and bad, and those of our friends, and brings us out at the end of our lives shaped and molded as he desires we shall be.

McGarvey's other sermon on divine providence was on Esther. After he had told the story of Esther in detail, he added these comments:

A few days ago I stood in the great fair at Chicago, before a weaving machine – a wonder. There were coming out beneath the shuttles bands of silk about as wide as my hand, and perhaps a foot long, four or five coming out at one time at different parts of the loom, woven with the most beautiful figures in divers colors. One of them was "*Home, Sweet Home,*" the words woven by that machine, and above the words was the music. There was woven at the top a beautiful cottage, trees in the yard, beegums, and children at play, and down below the words and music, a lone man sat, with his face resting on his hand, thinking about that distant home. All coming out of that machine. The shuttles were flying, threads were twisting and dodging about, the machine was rattling, and no human hand on it, yet there the song, the pictures, the music, were coming out. Did they come out by accident? By an accidental combination of circumstances? I could not, to save my life, tell how it was done, but I saw a pattern hanging up at one side with many holes throughout, and I was told that the pattern was ruling

the work of that intricate machinery, and leading to that result. I was bound to believe it. Now you could make me believe that this beautiful piece of work came out of the loom by accident, and without any man directing and planning it, just as easily as you can make me believe that this chain of circumstances, of facts, bring about, in according with God's faithful promises, the deliverance of his people, was accomplished without him. God was there, my brethren. And just as little can I believe that all those intricate circumstances in my life and yours, which shape mould and direct and guide us, which take us when we are crude and wicked men, and mould and shape us and grow us up until we are ripe and ready to be gathered into the eternal harvest – that all this is human, or all blind force, or accident, and that there is no hand of God in it. (**Sermons**, pp. 221-246).

Matthew 6:24-34

No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

The word "*mammon*" means wealth, riches, material possessions. The Lord says no man can serve two masters opposed to each other. Both cannot be served at the same time because they are opposed to each other in nature, spirit, and in their demands upon their servants. To be obedient to one is to oppose the other. It has been well said that "*we can serve God with wealth, but as soon as we begin to serve wealth we cease to serve God.*" Ruskin said, "*He who offers God a second place, offers him no place.*" It is important to note that the Lord often taught regarding wealth, property and material possessions because these matters are so intimately associated with mankind.

Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink. Nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?

“Take no thought” means *“be not anxious.”* To be *“anxious”* is to be possessed of painful uneasiness of mind regarding the present or future. Anxious persons are those filled with worry, care, mental uneasiness. It should be noted that Jesus associates what He says about anxiety here with what He had just said regarding mammon. This shows the undue concern about food, drink, clothing, shelter, etc., is by our Lord, regarded as service to mammon! We are not to conclude that the Lord forbids *prudence* – the exercise of wisdom – in worldly affairs. What He condemns is not forethought – it is fearthought – regarding the future. To be anxious and worried because we are afraid God will not supply our needs is an attitude of distrust in God and is described by our Lord as *“little faith”* (Matt. 6:30). It is proper for us to exercise due care of our bodies, but we must not become so concerned in this that we neglect our responsibility to God. The necessities of life may be classified under three heads: (1) food; (2) clothing; and (3) shelter. Jesus warns us, in this passage, against placing too much emphasis on these things in our lives. God gave us life; He will, therefore, supply us with that which is essential to maintain it.

The Lord gives beautiful illustrations to lead us to put our trust in the providence of God.

Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? ... Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

Sowing, reaping and gathering are essential processes of deriving food from the ground; the birds of heaven do none of this, yet God feeds them. He does not feed them in idleness, because they must engage in ceaseless activity to obtain their food. Nevertheless it is God who feeds them; and He will feed us if we perform

the proper functions of life, since the Lord regards His children of "*much more value*" than the birds. The lilies of the field are beautiful and God gives them their raiment. Their loveliness is greater than even Solomon in all his splendor. If God is concerned for birds and lilies, He will surely not forget the needs of His people. It was the design of the Lord to show us that since God does care for that which is of little value, He will all the more provide for those who are vastly more important.

Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field,
which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven,
shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little
faith?

The grass of the field would last but a short time and was used for fuel. Fuel has ever been scarce in Palestine and so weeds, hay, stubble, and grass were often used for this purpose in the ovens. God took care of the grass in spite of its brief existence on the earth. How much more is God concerned with those who are His children and are made in His image. To question God's care and show uncertainty regarding His providential care is "*little faith*." Jesus teaches: "*Be not therefore anxious*." Why? Our "*Heavenly Father knoweth*" that we must have food, clothing, shelter and other necessities of life and He will supply them. God "*knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him*" (Matt. 6:8). The Gentiles to whom Jesus refers were heathen people. They seek first after material needs, because they do not know God and are, therefore, unacquainted with divine providence. If His children do the same, they exhibit no more faith in God than the heathen do!

Instead of placing the material above the spiritual; we must place the spiritual above the material.

But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his
righteousness; and all these things shall be added
unto you.

Jesus here sets out (1) an obligation – "*seek*." This

means we must put forth effort in this matter. Jesus sets forth (2) objects to be sought, viz., the kingdom of God and His righteousness. To seek the kingdom is to seek its benefits, blessings, and joys. This we do by entering into the kingdom and claiming the blessings that are there. "*Righteousness*" is right-doing, the keeping of God's commandments (Psm. 119:172). (3) Jesus sets out a divine order – first. (4) There is here a conditional blessing – "*all these things shall be added unto you.*" When we have the proper attitude toward the kingdom and righteousness, He will supply our material needs. The word "*added*" here is of interesting significance. It is translated from a Greek word which means "*superadded*," something additional; that which is thrown in to boot. As Matthew Henry put it: "*He who buys goods has paper and twine flung in.*" Thus Jesus teaches us that if we will seek first His kingdom and righteousness, He will throw in extra, our material needs. "*Like as a father pitieth his children, so Jehovah pitieth them that fear him*" (Psm. 103:13).

Romans 8:28

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

The expressions "*them that love God*" and "*them that are called according to his purpose*" refer to the same persons – Christians. "*All things work together*" is from *panta sunergei* is to be understood in the context. Despite their infirmities (v. 26, cf. v. 38) and problems God is able to make "*all things work together*" in our lives "*for good*" (eis agathon), ultimate good. "*According to his purpose*" is from *kata protehsin*. Paul teaches the free agency of man but behind it all and through it all runs God's oversight of the world. So Christians need not be discouraged. They need not be dismayed or depressed in regard to anything that may happen to them in the course of their lives. They have obeyed the gospel

and have remission of their sins and God will add all other blessings that are needed. (1) Paul sets out a certain announcement, he says "*we know*" that all things work for good. In an age which has so many doubts and so much skepticism it is very comforting to hear of certainties. (2) Paul sets out a far reaching sweep, he says "*all things*." Our trials and blessings; our losses and our gains; things present and things to come are included. (3) Paul sets out a harmonious design of things, he said all things "*work together*." He did not say that everything that happens to you is good but God can overrule and make it work out for the good of Christians and the advancement of the cause of Christ. The persecution of Christians in Acts was not good but it worked out that the spreading out of Christians into different places that the gospel was spread out more. The placing of Paul in bonds would appear to hamper his work and destroy his effectiveness for Christ. But Paul writes as a prisoner,

But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel (Phil. 1:12).

He was able to preach before rulers and "*in all the palace*" as a prisoner of Christ. God used a prisoner of the empire to preach the gospel to many people who otherwise might not have heard.

There are parts of a ship or car that would not be much separated. But put them together and you can have a functional ship or car. So with the events of life. Some are tragic; some are happy. But when they are all built together, they form a life that can be a blessing to humanity. Though it may be in the next world, we will eventually see that the pieces fit together. (4) Paul sets out a principle that is restricted in its application. It is "*to them that love God*." So Paul is not describing general providence here. The good in this passage does not

come to all men, but to those who love and obey the Lord. To love God means we keep His commandments.

This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments (I John 5:3).

Conclusion

The study of the providence of God is certainly an important study. We should understand that God created all things (Gen. 1:1; Heb. 1:2). And if God created all things for good and wise purposes, we should naturally expect Him to exercise His providence in the working out of His purposes.

God preserves all things (Psm. 147:1-9; Acts 14:15-17; 17:24-28). Since God has put into creation wisdom and power, we would naturally conclude that He would be interested in preserving His people.

God rules in the affairs of nations (Job 12:13-25; Jer. 18:5-10; Dan. 4:25, 34-37). He is interested in all people. He is interested in the affairs of nations, to raise them up, to destroy them when they are wicked, to protect and care for them when they are righteous.

God rules in the affairs of families (Psm. 107:34-41; Jer. 10:25; 31:1). God rules in the affairs of individuals: the wicked (Rom. 9:14-18) and the righteous (Gen. 45:7-8). The individual is not overlooked by God. Nothing is too small to escape His power (Luke 12:6-7; Matt. 12:36-37).

Prayer implies the providence of God (Matt. 7:7-11; Rom. 15:30-32; James 1:5-8). It would be needless for the Christian to pray if he did not expect God to do something for him in answer to prayer. We may not always understand the providence of God but it is always there for the Christian. We walk by faith and not by sight.

Is It The Case That God — At Least At Times — Overrules Evil For Good?

Robert R. Taylor, Jr.

Introduction

It is a pleasure supreme to speak on this initial lectureship conducted by the good congregation at Southaven. I am thrilled that the journal, **POWER**, will soon make its literary debut in our journalistic ranks. I wish for it and the **POWER** Lectureship much success. In Thomas B. Warren and Garland Elkins the paper and lectureship have the finest of veteran leaders in both capacities. I truly appreciate the invitation from them and the good Southaven eldership to speak and to present a manuscript for the book. A scholarly and sincere lectureship on the "*Providence of God*" is an idea whose time has certainly come. This book will bless countless people for many years to come and even after all writers have gone the way of all the earth providing time continues on into the next century and thereafter. Look at how long-lived the McGarvey sermons on *Providence* have been and he has been dead for nearly eighty years or since 1911. An entire volume on providence is far better than two sermons on that topic of truth.

The Godhead is Maker or Creator of heaven and earth as per Genesis 1:1. A dynamic declaration from Isaiah 45:18 reads,

For thus saith the Lord that created the heavens;
God himself that formed the earth and made it; he
hath established it, he created it not in vain, he
formed it to be inhabited: I am the Lord; and there
is none else.

The Almighty had a purpose in creating a unique universe sparkling with power, purpose and precision. He purposed it to be peopled. This is why evolution is so far afield of truth by having the universe here for multiplied *billions* of years but life in simplest forms for *one-half billion years* or less. God spoke the universe into existence and populated it with plant life three days later, water and fowl life five days later and land life (including animals and man) six days later. Exodus 20:8-11 is crystal clear on this momentous matter relative to creative concerns. God did not create the world and people it with teeming forms of life in some sort of deistic fashion, i.e., winding it up as a clock allowing it to wind down with NO further interest exhibited therein. Perish such an ungodly philosophy! He was the creator of its creation; He is center of its continuation. There is a God in heaven and He rules in the kingdoms of men as per Daniel 4:17, 25. He has always been in the driver's seat; He STILL is; He ALWAYS will be. He has never abdicated either to Satan or to man. Since He is a being of total righteousness and immaculate equity and has a purpose for men to fulfill on earth, His purpose of the ages is not going to be thwarted by man. The Great Judge of the earth will do right as per Genesis 18:25. We can be as sure of this fundamental fact as was the patient patriarch — Abraham — in the morning of time.

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate beyond any point of quibbling or doubt that God does, at times, overrule evil for the long-ranged good that He purposes to be accomplished. Man cannot always see this because he is finite; God is always in the perfect know (absolute knowledge here) for He is infinite in knowledge and wisdom. James, half brother of our Lord in the

flesh and full brother in the faith, stated at the famed Jerusalem Conference, *“Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world”* (Acts 15:18). He can start at the beginning and go to the end; He can begin at the end and return to the beginning with no particle of trouble at all. Interwoven in breathtaking beauty in all this is the precious providence of God at work. Providence is how He provides for us; it is His foresight at work; it is how He works out His will for His human creation. Providence is one of the most fabulous and fascinating topics in all Holy Writ. The word itself occurs only once in our beloved King James Version and even there (Acts 24:2) it refers to the providence of a pagan governor over a subjected people. Yet God’s providence is part and parcel of the very fabric of Sacred Scripture. Scarcely a page can be read but what God’s providence is there directly or indirectly. We are frequently like Paul and have to qualify it with PERHAPS as he did in Philemon 15 but that still conveys to us an attractive assurance that God’s hand is always there one way or another where in His people and His purpose of the ages are concerned. This is one of the major differences between Deism and Christianity. Deism says God no LONGER cares; Christianity says He LOVINGLY cares. This is one of the major differences between Secular Humanism and Christianity. Humanism says man is in a cold, friendless world and has neither a Creator behind him nor a Preserver over him. Holy Writ says we have not only God as Creator and Provider but also as Redeemer of our immortal souls. This is a major difference between agnosticism and Christianity. The agnostic does not know; the Christian can know and does know that God exists and that He rewards those who seek Him with diligence and dedication (Heb. 11:6). The agnostic is just another fool along with the outright atheist as portrayed in Psalm 14:1 and 53:1. This is a major difference between a fatalistic philosophy that engulfs the miserable masses today and bright, beautiful and

blessed Christianity that says God lives and loves, He serves our needs and saves our souls.

Joseph And His Brethren Form A Case In Point

The story of one man and his family — Abraham and his descendants — forms the basic thrust in the last thirty-nine chapters of Genesis — a beautiful book of beginnings. This stately story involves great grandsons of Abraham — Joseph and ten of his brethren. Eleven of Jacob's sons were born during the long years he spent in Laban's land — Padanaram. His last son — Benjamin — was born in Canaan — near Bethlehem where he buried his beloved Rachel. These dozen sons came from all four of Jacob's wives — Leah and Rachel who were primary wives and Bilhah and Zilpah who were secondary wives. Leah bore Jacob six sons and daughter Dinah. Jacob had two sons each by Bilhah, Zilpah and Rachel. Sons by Rachel were Joseph and Benjamin. (Rachel died in giving birth to Benjamin). These clearly and minus all quibbling to the contrary were the definite favorites of Jacob. Parental partiality not only characterized the home in which Jacob grew up under Isaac and Rebekah but became a definite and long-time pattern of his own home with four wives and thirteen children. The six sons of Leah, the two sons of Bilhah and the two sons of Zilpah did not take too kindly to Jacob's preferential treatment of their half-brother — Joseph. Four of the brothers — Dan, Naphtali, Gad and Asher — would not have appreciated the fact that their evil report was detected by an alert Joseph and brought to Jacob's attention (Gen. 37:2). Some surface students of the Bible have reprimanded Joseph's actions here and left minus all censure the four brethren in error. There would have been no evil report for Joseph to bring unless the brothers had contrived one. Perhaps the critics say more about themselves than they intend to say.

The ten older brethren would have been very naive

had they not noted how Jacob loved Joseph — son of his old age — more than he did them individually or even in the aggregate (Gen. 37:3). They took none too kindly to the coat of many colors which the partial Jacob gave to Joseph (Gen. 37:3). A daily witnessing of Joseph arrayed in that colorful coat made them see a definite color — red. They harbored hatred in their hearts toward preferred Joseph. They burned in rage toward him and withheld any and all peaceful communications from him (Gen. 37:4). The agricultural and celestial dreams that young Joseph had only deepened their hostility and hatred toward Rachel's firstborn (Gen. 37:5ff). They saw the implication foreshadowed in those dreams — the older brethren failing in obeisance before Joseph. In their hardened hearts and sin-stained spirits they vowed they would never break and bow before the teen-age dreamer.

Their brimming-over of hatred and deep-seated hostility had to remain in restraint as long as Jacob's eye was upon them. The day finally came when they were in central Canaan and father Jacob was far to the south — still in southern Canaan or Hebron. Joseph is dispatched to check on the welfare of his brethren. Joseph was a seeker of his brethren as he declared in Genesis 37:16 to an inquiring citizen of the Shechem area (Gen. 37:14-15). When the ten brethren saw him they, except for Reuben — his one and only defender and shield among them — laid prompt plans for his destruction. At first they put him into a pit to starve him. Then they sold him for twenty pieces of coveted silver to mercenary traders who took him to Egypt. Surely, they thought that the dreamer is out of our hair from now on. Evil dominated their nefarious plans and purposes for Joseph from the word go. Neither Joseph nor his nine evil brethren — Reuben had no part in selling him but planned later to save him from the pit and deliver him safely to Jacob — had any way of knowing at the time that God would overrule this act of treachery in behalf of a larger

purpose — subsequent salvation of Jacob's whole family and keeping intact the onward march of those Abrahamic promises of Genesis 12:1ff; 26:3-5; 28:13-15; and Acts 7:3-5. Joseph was the first to see it twenty-two years later when he said,

I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life (Gen. 45:4, 5).

Seventeen years after he said to his older brethren just subsequent to Jacob's demise,

Fear now: for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive (Gen. 50:19-20).

Jehovah overruled the evil they intended for the accomplishment of His long-ranged plans. Indeed it is the case that God — on occasion — overrules evil for good. My case could rest proved at this strategic point but much more can be said and will be said in proof of this intriguing proposition.

Job Forms Another Case In Point

When just Job is first introduced to us he is a very wealthy Uzzean of the East. His reputation is spotless; his character is quite outstanding. God analyzed him as perfect, upright, one who feared his Maker and a hater of evil (Job 1:8). He has a family of twelve — wife, seven sons, three daughters and himself. Servants number into the many of his extended household. Eleven thousand head of livestock belong to him. Satan assailed his character and declared that Job served God because it paid rich dividends. Satan said if Job lost everything in the way of earthly possessions, he would curse his heavenly benefactor. God allowed Satan to inflict heavy loss after heavy loss upon Job. He is bankrupt in a matter

of moments; he is bereft of his children more quickly than it takes to depict it. In Job 2 Satan further slanders Job's character and dedication to his God on heavenly high. Job had not done what Satan said he would do in the first round of serious adversities. Satan said if Job lost his health, he would then curse God. This was allowed with the stipulation that Job's life not be taken. Job was quickly covered with boils from head to foot. He was misery personified. Mrs. Job urged that Job's retention of integrity was folly to the nth degree; she pleaded that he curse God and die — just get on out of the picture altogether (Job 2:9). Job analyzed such as foolish ranting upon her deeply ungrateful, irreverent part (Job 2:10). In chapters 3:32 Job is subjected to the insensitive harangues of his three supposed friends — Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar. They proceed upon a false basis of logic from the word go. They know Job is in great affliction. They surmise that all suffering results from one's personal sins. Hence, Job must be about the world's greatest sinner. Elihu, a younger man has his say in chapters 33-37. Then God speaks in chapters 38-41. Job suffered much from chapter 1 through chapter 41. Yet God overruled it in chapter 42 and blessed him with double prosperity. The book of Job helps us to understand better the problem of human suffering. This book shows that a good man will serve God whether he be in riches or rags, whether he be healthy or physically afflicted, whether he be high in people's estimation (excellency of reputation) or deeply despised by his peers as was Job during these long months. Jehovah's overruling providence permeates the forty-two chapters of Job.

Ancient Israel Is A Case In Point

Jehovah had a purpose for the Israelites of the Old Testament. Frequently, they sought to thwart that God-given purpose. Chastisement and strict discipline often were meted out to them. Frequently, they were sold into

bondage to near and remote neighbors. When they cried to God He heard and heeded their penitent cry. He overruled in order that His long-ranged purpose might remain intact. Egypt held them in the severity of serfdom prior to the amazing Exodus. God overruled and led them out of Egyptian bondage with His extended hand of heavenly power. Chastisement was frequently their lot in the wilderness but God overruled in such fashion as to keep intact the developing Abrahamic promises. The book of Judges is filled with their apostasies, being sold into bondage to near or remote pagan powers, their penitence, their cry for heavenly help, the raising up of judges or deliverers and a period of grace. Then in cycle-like form the process was repeated. During the period of some forty-one kings from Saul to Zedekiah they were frequently chastised but God ever overruled to keep intact His long-ranged Messianic plans and purposes.

Without serious doubt Judah viewed as great evil all that the invading Chaldeans did between 605 B.C., time of first deportation, and 586 B.C., time of Jerusalem's fall, in the three deportations of Jews to distant Babylon and ultimately the full capture of Zion after eighteen months of serious seige. Seventy long years they were in captivity to Chaldea. Desolate Jerusalem is portrayed in the five elegies or funeral-like dirges of Lamentations. Sorrows of Chaldean captivity are portrayed in Psalm 137, in Ezekiel and throughout much of Daniel's prophetic product. Yet these seventy years were pruning and purging years. Idolatry, long their besetting sin, was being purged out gradually and permanently of disciplined Judah. The remnant that came back were free of idolatrous inclinations and tendencies. God has overruled this calamitous period for their ultimate good and for the accomplishment of His long-ranged purpose.

Paul's Various Imprisonments Are Further Cases In Point

Paul had many prison experiences as Acts and his

epistles fully reflect. In II Corinthians 11:23 he referred to the frequency of his prison experiences. He and Silas are viciously beaten at Philippi with multiple stripes laid on them (Acts 16:22-23). Minus mercy they are thrust “into the inner prison” and their feet are held “fast in the stocks” (Acts 16:24). Surely, evil treatment has been their lot up to this painful point. Paul speaks of the suffering and shameful treatment they had undergone at Philippi in I Thessalonians 2:1-2. Yet God overruled matters that night in a Philippian prison that before morning broke the jailor and his family were converts to Christ. The prison experience was handled so skillfully by the God-led apostle that governmental leaders gave Paul a public vindication of what they had done the day and night before; quick was their extended apology. The cause Paul and Silas represented was victoriously vindicated before observant pagan leadership and an entire watchful city in Macedonia — Philippi. No wonder a good and great congregation developed in Philippi of Macedonia. Jehovah, Jesus and the Holy Spirit, the Timeless Trinity, were all working in the beautiful background of such. Paul and his evangelistic helpers were cooperating in holy harmony.

Paul was unjustly imprisoned at Jerusalem in Acts 22 and 23 and after a short time was taken to Caesarea for a much longer imprisonment in Acts 23-26. Yet during these two years Paul preached to people like Felix, Drusilla, Festus, Agrippa, Bernice and many unnamed dignitaries who otherwise would never have heard the gospel of Christ. It is true that not any of the mentioned ones became Christians as per the Biblical record but yet Paul discharged his debt to take the gospel to as many people as he could — “witnessing both to small and great” (Acts 26:22). Think how many people subsequent to these Pauline messages have been influenced for good by Paul’s message of righteousness, temperance (self-control) and judgment to Felix and Drusilla in Acts 24:24-25 and Paul’s masterful

lesson to King Agrippa in Acts 26. Acts 26 initially resulted in NO conversions as per the Biblical record but many have been led to accept Christ after hearing this chapter preached powerfully and fervently to them. I have seen many people obey the gospel when I finished with an impassioned sermon on “*A Christian Just Like Paul*” — based on Acts 26:24-29. God was overruling the evil that Pauline enemies inflicted upon his faithful apostle for the ultimate good of his redemptive cause upon earth.

Subsequent to the two years Paul spent as prisoner in Caesarea came another two years in Rome as prisoner (Acts 28:30-31). Paul alludes to this in Philippians 1:12ff. Doubtless his Philippian supporters felt that it was a great deprivation on Paul’s part to be incarcerated and no longer free to travel anywhere and everywhere with towering truth as his proclaimed message. Paul wrote,

But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel; So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places; And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: The one preach Christ of contention, nor sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defense of the gospel. What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached: and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice (Phil. 1:12-18).

The Lord overruled matters with Paul the prisoner for the advancement of his Cause — getting the gospel into human hearts. The gospel was furthered by Paul in prison. It is altogether possible he did more good as a prisoner of the Lord for these two years than had he come to Rome free and remained there in total liberty. He touched lives and built up the spirit and resolve of

fellow laborers that otherwise might never have materialized. Let us not forget that powerful, Pauline pen during this duet of years. It was not idle. He penned Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon — fifteen powerful, profitable chapters of Holy Writ and one of them quoted in part in this very section of our study! By this quartet of eloquent, excellent epistles from his pen, guided and governed by the Infallible Holy Spirit, the peerless apostle and faithful literary teacher has touched the lives of multiplied millions. The concerned Philippians, as they read the epistle directed to them initially, were already reaping the faithful fruits and intense influences of an imprisoned apostle. Perhaps there would never have been saints in Caesar's household unless Paul had been imprisoned in Rome (Phil. 4:22). God was still in the overruling business for the good of His Son's kingdom on earth.

Christ's Crucifixion Is Another Case In Point

The cross did not catch Deity off guard as premillennial misfits have to conclude by the very implications of their materialistic mania for a wholly earthly kingdom. Psalm 22:16 says by way of predictive prophecy that both hands and feet of the Messiah would be pierced (a clear prophetic allusion to Calvary). Psalm 16, as Peter uses so convincingly in Acts 2 on Pentecost, portrays the short nature of His death and that in triumph He would rise from the dead. Yet good people would not do the crucifying; evil people would do that. They would do it with a fierce thirst for blood permeating all actions connected therewith. Peter says in his great Pentecostal sermon, "*Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain*" (Acts 2:23). Verse 36 again lays the crucifixion at their totally guilty feet. This enormous evil of which they were verily guilty that forlorn Friday is alluded to again by Peter on

Solomon's porch in Acts 3:13. He says God **glorified** His Son; you **delivered** Him up; you **denied** Him in Pilate's presence when the pressed Pilate was **determined** to let Him go. Their evil even exceeded that of the vacillating governor. In Acts 5:30-31 Peter and the courageous apostles, in the presence of the Sanhedrin, again laid at their infamous feet that this Jesus *"ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins."*

Yet, God overruled all the evil they sought to inflict on the Messiah and turned the act into the fundamental framework in which sins, even the colossal crime of the Messianic crucifixion itself, could be forgiven by the merits of that powerful, precious, priceless blood — *"the blood of his cross"* as Paul expressed it in Colossians 1:20. By the marvelous merits of this powerful, sin-forgiving blood a penitent Pilate could have been forgiven. So could Judas, Caiaphas, Annas and all others linked thereunto.

It was Jehovah's will for His only begotten Son to die. Yet the men who sent Him to the brutal blow of cruel Calvary acted as free moral agents. Some have experienced deep difficulty in placing these two fundamental facts side by side. Peter and the apostles placed them side by side and with no difficulty felt at all as per the Biblical record. Paul later did the same.

Stephen's Stoning Is Another Case In Point

Stephen is the dominant character in Luke's account from Acts 6:8 through the end of Acts 7, longest chapter in the book of Acts. An enraged Sanhedrin stoned the saintly Stephen after the great defense he made in beautiful behalf of truth. The latter verses of Acts 7 describe his stoning. They meant to inflict great evil upon this dedicated disciple, this saintly servant, this powerful preacher, this effective evangelist. Yet God

overruled this first Christian martyrdom for the ardent advancement of His Cause. The widespread dispersion of disciples subsequent to Stephen's death caused the gospel to be radiated into places where the gospel previously had not gone. Those who stoned Stephen meant it to be a lethal, knockout blow to the budding movement of the crucified carpenter. Instead God caused it to be a steppingstone to wider and broader diffusion of the redemptive story of Christ and Him crucified.

The Defection Of Onesimus Is Perhaps Another Point Of Proof

I say PERHAPS because Paul included that very term in Philemon 15. Philemon, at one time, owned a slave by name of Onesimus. Whether acquired by money or born into slavery in Philemon's family, we have no way of knowing. We do know the day came however that Onesimus defected his Colossian master — Philemon. Philemon naturally would have deemed this to be an act of grievous wrongdoing on the part of runaway Onesimus. In the chain of events Onesimus went to Rome. There he came into contact with the imprisoned Paul. Paul converted him. Incidentally, this was another case of Paul's imprisonment furthering gospel interests (Cf. Phil. 1:12ff). Paul knew what right and truth demanded — Onesimus must return to his master. Gospel obedience had not washed away that continuing obligation. Paul sent him back and wrote Philemon a touching missive, a loving letter. Therein Paul wrote, *"For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever;..."* (Phile. 15). Paul is saying that PERHAPS this defection on his part resulted in his salvation. If providential, Paul is saying that God overruled what was wrong on his part into his ultimate redemption. Yet there was still a standing obligation to make proper amends to the offended Philemon and the whole epistle breathes forth that fundamental recognition.

The Kingdom Of God Can Be Advanced Both By Righteous, Dedicated Lives And By Courageous Martyrdoms

Paul recognized this crystal clear principle in the precious Philippian epistle. He wrote succinctly, sacrificially and superbly.

For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you. And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith; That your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again (Phil. 1:19-26).

Paul's holy resolve throughout this priceless piece of penmanship is that Christ may be magnified. Would an extension of the Pauline life magnify the Messiah? Then that is what Paul prayerfully petitioned and what he desired his precious Philippian supporters to petition also. Would Pauline martyrdom magnify the Messiah? Then that is what moved Paul to desire. What was best for the cause of Christ is what moved Paul more than any one other motivation.

As far as Paul personally was concerned he knew a departure to Deity was preferred to an extended existence for him on Jehovah's footstool. Yet, there was more than Paul in the momentous matter. There was God; there was Christ; there was the Spirit of holiness; there was the kingdom and its spread under the authoritative auspices of that marching, militant Great Commis-

sion. Particularly, there were people like the precious Philippians who could benefit beautifully by subsequent Pauline visits among them. Selfless service for the advancement of the cause removed him out of the strait and left him with the whole-hearted and true-hearted conviction that his life would be spared and he would continue for a time yet as Christ's soldier in a preaching and writing work — a work of faith, a labor of love and all in patience of hope as per I Thessalonians 1:3. Paul knew that God's precious providence would ever lead him into channels best for the message and best for Paul the messenger.

It seems certain that Paul was released from that initial Roman imprisonment, was given a three to five year period of liberty in which time he visited much of the Roman world, wrote I Timothy and Titus and about 67 A.D. was imprisoned at Rome a second and final time. Prior to death he penned his final missive — II Timothy. At its literary end — II Timothy 6:6-8 — he knew the sands of his hourglass were running out. He wrote in valor and victory permeating every stately syllable.

For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

Rome soon martyred him but not before he wrote in tenor of truth and in tones of tremendous triumph, *“And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen”* (II Tim. 4:18). Then the glorious crown of regal righteousness would become his priceless, precious possession (II Tim. 4:8).

There is no conceivable way we can place a human calculation on what Stephen's martyrdom in Acts 7,

James' martyrdom in Acts 12 or an allusion to Antipas' martyrdom in Revelation 2:13 meant to the early saints in the apostolic period of budding Christianity. Look at the inspiration of a Polycarp who served the Saviour for fourscore and six years and became a burning martyr rather than recant his redemptive religion and declare instead that the current Caesar was Lord and God.

By life in the Lord and a death for Deity, if necessary, we can advance the kingdom of God. Minus doubt or quibble it seems certain to me that Heavenly Providence is intensely operative in such. If God's providence feeds fowls, gives sustenance to sheep and gives us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, who can doubt but what his precious, powerful providence is at work in those who live for the Lord and die for Deity?

In the moving hymn written by W. E. Brightwell and set to music by L. O. Sanderson, "*The Providence of God*," we have these words of weight and wisdom set out in lyrical loveliness,

The mighty God, Omniscient One!
His ways we cannot trace.
He reckons every good begun
And crowns it with His grace.

Lo! I can see Him in His word —
I will not doubt or fear;
My steps are ordered of the Lord,
His guiding hand is near.

No trial can my spirit break,
For God will not forsake;
He will with each temptation make,
A way for my escape.

The future beckons and I bow —
My God removes the care!
Behold, He goes before me now,
And will my way prepare.

In chorus the marvel and majesty continue and conclude,

He's here, and there, and everywhere
In all the ways I've trod.
I've never passed beyond the sphere,
Of the providence of God.
(Used by special permission from brother L. O.
Sanderson who holds the copyright to this song).

Paul closed the bright, blessed and beautiful ninth chapter of II Corinthians with these words of immortality, "*Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift*" (v. 15). I should like to close this chapter with the same words and only one word change, "*Thanks be unto God for His UNSPEAKABLE PROVIDENCE.*"

Chapter 21

The Providence Of God And Philippians 4:6-7

Keith A. Mosher, Sr.

Any relationship with the brethren is a joy. My association with the Southaven Church of Christ, its excellent eldership, deacons, evangelists (especially the years spent working with John Curtis) and good members and friends is a continuing blessing.

With Garland Elkins as the new evangelist, the congregation continues to advance the cause of Christ in North Mississippi. The **POWER** lectureship, I believe, will prove to be a boon to truth. Many disparage efforts to “*hold the line*” and to walk in the “*old paths*.” Any congregation that will stand should be commended, applauded, and supported. The Southaven Church of Christ does stand. It is a distinct privilege to be invited to speak on this first ever **POWER** series.

Introduction

This discussion centers on the relationship of the providence of God to Paul’s statement, “*In nothing be anxious...*” (Phil. 4:6-7). Other lectures in this series will expound on the definition of providence. The effort here will center on the text, the connection of miracles to modern prayer, the Bible and worry, and closing arguments.

The poet, Keith Bennett, has written:

Where his eye is on the sparrow
and each budding leaf that grows;
When he sends the dew each morning

and the sunshine to the rose;
You may know beyond all doubting,
In this trial you're passing through,
God cares ... and every moment
He is watching over you.

To know that God cares is a vital understanding for the Christian. Paul reminded the brethren at Corinth that the Israelites had lost hope in God and had committed sin to the point of falling away (I Cor. 10:1-10). They had crossed the Red Sea, were saved, yet when left without leadership while Moses ascended the mountain, they turned to idols (I Cor. 10:7). They thought they were "*standing*" alone and so fell (I Cor. 10:8). One who thinks he is standing by himself is subject to the same tragic end as those Israelites (I Cor. 10:11-12). Paul reminds his readers that no one has ever been tried beyond that which is common to man (I Cor. 10:13a). And, "*God is faithful*" and that knowledge "*provides a way of escape*" to bear the trial (I Cor. 10:13b).

When Paul writes "*in nothing be anxious*" (Phil. 4:6a) he has in mind the care that God provides so that the Christian need not be so worried that he loses his faith and falls.

Prayer Power: The Test In Philipians Four

One's thoughts determine his life (Matt. 12:34-37). Paul became a great missionary for Christ because the apostle got his thoughts straight on the law of Moses (Phil. 3:2-3) and on who should be first (Phil. 3:4-12). In chapter four of Philipians Paul emphasizes that faithfulness to Christ is the basis of Christian joy (4:1-9). The result of Christian joy is *serenity* (4:10-23).

One achieves joy by "*standing fast in the Lord*" (4:1). Christians can be steadfast because their Master is so powerful (Phil. 3:21) and their citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20). The term *steadfast* in the text is a military term for a soldier who remains firm during the shock of battle. Many Christians are tempted to panic

when the going gets difficult. It would be helpful to remember that Paul wrote the Philippian letter *while in prison!*

One achieves the joy that leads to serenity by practicing unity (4:2). The names Euodias (“*prosperous journey*”) and Syntyche (“*good luck*”) are female. Two bickering women in a pure church would certainly create a real disturbance! One not practicing unity with brethren will not avail himself of God’s providence and will be overly anxious.

Helping others brings peace of mind (4:3). Despite any bickering on their part, the women were Christians. Other brethren are urged to help them and to bear their burdens (Gal. 6:2). In helping others one can eliminate self-pity and worry.

True peace and joy come by and through Christ (4:4). Many call on God during times of difficulty. They desire providential help from God, but they have ignored the fact that that kind of help is only *in Christ*. The providence of God *has* provided the place of rejoicing – in Christ. One enters Christ by believing the facts of the gospel, repenting of sin, confessing Christ as God’s Son, and by being immersed in water for the remission of sins (John 8:24; Acts 17:30; I Tim. 6:12; Gal. 3:26-27). Those outside of Christ are without hope and without God in the world (Eph. 2:12). How can that one expect to stop being overly anxious since his sins are not forgiven?

One can also achieve serenity through Christian forbearance (4:5). The term, *moderation*, could be translated “*sweet reasonableness*” or “*gentleness*.” It is the attitude that will meet another brother in Christ, or even a person in the world, halfway. This attitude tempers justice with mercy (James 3:17). God’s providence will not be available to those who are unwilling to show mercy and forgiveness (James 1:20). The opposite of *moderation* is *selfishness*. One not dependent on God’s care has only self to enjoy!

Constant prayer also leads to great joy (4:6-7). The

phrase “*Be careful for nothing...*” (KJV), or “*In nothing be anxious...*” (ASV), is in the present imperative in the original. Paul was saying, *stop* being overly worried. Jesus said, “*Therefore, take no thought...*” (Matt. 6:31). The Lord meant that His followers should not be in anxiety over earthly matters.

The key to Paul’s command to stop being overly concerned is proper prayer. Paul *prohibits* anxiousness by commanding thanksgiving (4:6). Solomon wrote:

A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones (Prov. 17:22).

Psychosomatic illness prevention starts by eliminating self-pity. Being overly anxious indicates a divided, unstable mind (James 1:8). (This is the reason that Paul wrote verse eight. One must think on right things. God does care. Too many do not think so.) Then, Paul sets forth the *precept* that one must tell God the problem. Why? Because God *can* and *will* help! The *promise* is that great peace is available. The *problem* may still exist. But, the Christian knows that God is with him during the trial. God is still the friend to His children. God will be there! The word *keep* (v. 7) is a military term meaning *guard* or *garrison*. God’s peace is a sentinel in the Christian’s life.

As this is written, a grandson lies fighting for his life in a hospital in another city. There is concern, but there is also peace. The baby is safe with God in any case. All that can be done for him is being achieved. Constant prayer has been and is being made. There is deep pain in our hearts for his suffering and ours, but there is also thankfulness for his brief life that has taught us so much about love and caring. There is peace with God through whose providence a hospital was found, and help was forthcoming. The family is grateful.

Prayer Answered: Miracles?

Some are confused and surmise that God must

perform a miracle in order to answer a prayer. God answered prayer long before the “*Holy Spirit was given*” (John 7:39). Did God answer prayers for Abraham, Moses, Esther, etc.? Did such answers require the miraculous?

An Old Testament example of a praying man is Elijah. James used that venerable prophet to illustrate the effective prayer of the righteous (James 5:17-18). Note that Elijah was “...*a man subject to like passions as we are...*” (James 5:17a). That is, Elijah was exactly as anyone who is God’s child. No miraculous power can be equated with Elijah’s power. Elijah prayed for and not for rain. Both prayers were answered. For God to withhold or provide rain is providential, not miraculous. The problem of thinking that God must perform a supernatural act to answer prayer lies in a misunderstanding of the miraculous. To be without anxiety while praying requires trust in the availability of providence (Phil. 4:6-7).

What is a miracle? William Taylor defines such very well by stating:

...a work out of the usual sequences of causes and effects ... which cannot be accounted for by the ordinary operation of the causes (**Miracles of our Savior**, p. 4).

Taylor is arguing, scripturally, that a miracle does not “*violate*” natural laws, but that a supernatural act is the introduction, by God, of a *new* cause. For rain to fall, or not to fall, when Elijah prayed is not *supernatural* but *natural*. *IF* the same circumstances existed today, and one as righteous as Elijah prayed, the *same* results could be expected (James 5:16). A miracle does not so much suspend natural law as it introduces a cause beyond the human experience. This is the reason that a miracle is said to be a “*wonder*” (Acts 2:22). Such a new cause creates awe in the mind of the observer. Those expecting a miracle today will have to explain how some *new* law has been introduced by God in their peculiar case!

God's providence works in the area of pre-arranged laws. With this truth in mind the Psalmist wrote:

The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth (Psm. 145:18).

Paul wrote,

Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, the Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what men shall do unto me (Heb. 13:5-6).

There are natural laws pertaining to hygiene, medicine, physicians and surgeons. Timothy was admonished to use medicine to help his stomach (I Tim. 5:23). Paul wrote that. Did not the apostle believe in prayer? The same apostle left his companion Trophimus at Miletum sick (II Tim. 4:20). Where was prayer? Where was the miraculous? (Miracles, even in New Testament times, were only available when confirming truth [Heb. 2:1-4]). Trophimus must seek help where available as all must today. One should pray that the medicine, doctors, and all help is that which is correct for the situation. That prayer *will* work for it is in the framework of providence!

James D. Williford wrote:

The Bible teaches that every prayer that goes out of a good man's heart, goes somewhere and does some good (Sept. 7, 1952).

When God said that prayer is effectual, should not God's children believe it?

Provision From God

David well understood God's providence. He wrote:

When I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches. Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings

will I rejoice (Psm. 63:6-7).

Daniel is reported to have

...kneeled upon his knees three time a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime (Dan. 6:10b).

If ever a man could have been *anxious* it was Daniel. He faced a death sentence from a misguided Persian king. But, Daniel waited on God *with thanksgiving* (cf. Phil. 4:6-7).

Ezra knew that God could provide even for a penniless people. So the great restorer prayed: that God would providentially use a Persian king's treasury for that which would be "*...needful for the house of God...*" (Ezra 7:20). Artaxerxes was used by God to answer Ezra's petition (Ezra 7:21).

Samuel called on a providential God to protect Israel against the Philistines (I Sam. 7:8-10). In the midst of the prayer a storm so frightened the Philistines that they fled! Samuel raised a memorial to God's help – an Ebenezer. Many today have received help from God in a number of ways but have failed to give thanks. The story is told of a man riding his roof-top during a flood. He prays for God's help. Someone comes in a boat. He turns the boat away saying that he is waiting on God. Someone comes in a helicopter. He turns the helicopter away. He says that he is waiting on God's help. The flood rises and the man drowns. When he appears before God he is asked why he drowned. God says: "*I sent you a boat and helicopter, what did you want?*" Much help comes. Not everything may be providential. But God's child needs to be aware that aid is provided.

Nehemiah prayed and confessed the sins of himself and his people (Neh. 1:4-11). Nehemiah wanted to go home after long years in Babylonian captivity. God's means of answering the prayer involved Nehemiah's job (cup-bearer to Artaxerxes – Neh. 2:1) and Nehemiah's

facial expression (Neb. 2:1-2)! Can God answer prayer through common means? He did so on that occasion!

Some quit praying because of a multitude of problems in their lives. Their emotions overwhelm them. Take heart from Daniel, David, Ezra, and Nehemiah. Their problems involved countries, heads of state, death and political machinations. God solved every problem without a miracle – God’s providence was the answer. One can learn not to be overly anxious by having a strong prayer life and a strong trust in God (cf. Phil. 4:6-7).

One can not expect always to be at his peak, always to be “*high*” emotionally (see Rom. 7:14ff). There are times when all want to quit (cf. Paul and Eph. 3:8). Prayer, that trusts in God’s providence, may or may not produce a “*good*” feeling. But, because the feeling is or is not enjoyable does not make the prayer more or less acceptable to God. The prayer of a distraught heart might even be heard more quickly! (Think on the Lord’s prayers from the Cross!)

God is personal, all-wise, and ever present. He is a father loving His children. God has a purpose for life and a destiny for every individual. God listens and helps.

Prayer Conquers Anxiety

Anxiety is the mother of self-pity and the daughter of a prayer-less life. One’s request must be made known to God (Phil. 4:6-7). Legitimate concern is not anxiety (i.e., being *overly* anxious). The illness of a loved one, impending bankruptcy, loss of health, job, home, etc. are legitimate concerns. A Christian can *endure* such trials, not cope with them but endure them, through laying the burden before God. Now there is Divine aid and that thought brings a peace “*passing understanding*” (Phil. 4:7).

Jeremiah wrote:

Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord and whose hope the Lord is (Jer. 17:7).

Job had a multitude of problems. Note Job's way of handling them. At first Job can't seem to find God.

Oh that I knew where I might find him! That I might come even to his seat (Job 23:3).

In the midst of true anxiety it is not unusual to think God is far away. But Job knows what he would do if he could speak to God.

I would order my cause before him, I would find my mouth with arguments (Job 23:4).

The word, *arguments*, is akin to *pleas*. Job has forgotten that God still cares. He thinks that God has forsaken him. He has no peace of mind. Bible students know that God did love Job, and when Job finally "*confronts*" God an amazing thing occurs. God questions Job (Job 38:1ff)! Job discovers the profound truth. God was in charge all along. Job did not need to "*argue*" with God. Job just needed to trust. God was his friend after all (Job 42:10).

A day of life can bring a multitude of concerns. Practically speaking one should start each morning with prayer.

My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord: in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up (Psm. 5:3).

Sufficient unto each day are its problems (Matt. 6:34).

Prayer at dawn can insulate one against the anxieties of the entire waking period.

Praying before every meal will remind God's child that even in the mundane things of life – God cares. God's Son taught His disciples to pray: "*Give us this day our daily bread*" Matt. 6:11).

Praying at set times keeps the anxious heart in tune with God's peace. The Jews knew the value of scheduled

prayer (Acts 3:1). These periods can keep the world from crowding out communion with God. Of course, praying at odd times, whenever one feels the desire, even in silence – *“praying without ceasing”* – keeps one close to the peace of God.

Praying with one’s family, before bed-time, when discouraged, when happy, when sad are all suggested in the text of Philippians 4:6-7).

Summary

When one prays where does he look? Does he see the problem, the pain, the need, the surroundings, or does he see Almighty Jehovah God? When one prays in God’s direction, one knows that he has an answer. Paul wrote the words now labelled Philippians 4:6-7 while he was chained to a Roman soldier. The apostle of Christ had no freedom and no privacy but to him and countless other faithful Christians the Roman tyrants were nothing in comparison to Christ their Lord. Christ made each follower *more* than any conqueror (Rom. 8:37). Does not the faithful Christian have the same Christ today? Why then so much anxiety and fear?

Think on things wonderful.

What shall we then say to these things: If God be for us, who can be against us (Rom. 8:31)

Trust the natural providence of God and be thankful for His care. God *is* in His heaven, He is tending to His children’s needs.

For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayers... (I Peter 3:12a).

Too much worry is sin (Matt. 6:19-31). Too many who are overly anxious have not *“let their requests be made known to God.”*

Prayer is the soul’s sincere desire,
Uttered or unexpressed:

The motion of a hidden fire,
that trembles in the breast.
Prayer is the burden of a sigh,
the falling of a tear;
The upward glancing of an eye
when none but God is near.
Prayer is the Christian's vital breath
The Christian's native air,
His watchword at the gates of death,
He enters heaven with prayer.

(This Thing Called Prayer, Anonymous)

Chapter 22

The Providence Of God And The Adequacy Of Christ (Col. 1:16-17)

Joe Gilmore

Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist (Col. 1:15-17)

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the **fulness** of the Godhead bodily. And ye are **complete** in him, which is the head of all principality and power (Col. 2:8-10).

A very subtle and destructive heresy had invaded the church at Colosse, the heresy of Gnosticism. This philosophy advocated that all flesh is inherently and essentially evil, and that God is inherently and essentially holy. Therefore between human flesh and the Holy God there can be no communion or fellowship. The Gnostics taught that between the Holy God and human flesh there was a long chain of intermediate beings. These beings were angelic in their nature. This brought about the practice of worshipping angels. Thus Paul said

Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into

those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind (Col. 2:18).

Two schools of thought resulted from this philosophy. One denied that Jesus was any part divine. This school believed that Jesus was altogether human. This, of course, destroyed the sovereign Lordship and Deity of Jesus. Another school of thought denied that Jesus was any part human. This school believed that He was altogether divine. A denial of the fact of Christ's death was made. It was naturally advocated that His death on the cross was only imaginary. Therefore Paul said,

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.

History is repeating itself, for there has arisen another form of modern Gnosticism known as Modernism, Humanism or Liberal Protestantism, all of which is just another name for infidelity. Modernism and infidelity are interchangeable terms. It is just infidelity trying to parade itself in the garb of scholarship and religion. It is a wolf in sheep's clothing. Modernism would give us a human Bible robbed of all its divine inspiration. Modernism would give us a human Christ with no relation to Deity.

Paul assures us that in Christ *"all things consist."* Also Paul says that in Christ *"dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily."* *"Fulness"* means that which is filled or made complete. Hence the meaning is that all the moral attributes or qualities of the Eternal God are in Christ. If any attribute or quality of God were lacking in Christ, then it would be impossible for inspiration to say that in Christ *"dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily."*

Christ's fulness is sufficient for us. Paul says, *"And ye are complete in Him, which is the head of all principality and power."* We are not to look to the aid of human philosophy as though there were defects in the

teachings of Christ. We are not to look to human strength as if Christ were not able to save. No man is to look to the merits of the saints as if those of the Redeemer were not adequate to meet all our needs. When Christ came Roman law had failed; Greek philosophy had failed; Oriental mysticism had failed. All these had failed. All the remedies of our day, except the remedy which is in Christ, have failed. We have tried industry and diplomacy. We have tried statecraft and secular education. We have even tried the plan of the United Nations. Still the Lord is asking:

Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness (Isa. 55:2).

Let us leave off these insufficient and failing remedies offered by the world. For our present and eternal welfare let us try Christ who is *“the same yesterday, and today, and forever”* (Heb. 13:8). Jesus meets the test for every time of need!

Christ Is Adequate For Every Test Of Life

Thus Paul said,

But my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:19).

Christ Is Adequate For Salvation From Sin

Man's greatest need is not wealth, for Jesus said,

For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul (Matt. 16:26).

Man's greatest need is not health, for Paul said,

For though our outward man perish, yet the inward

man is renewed day by day (II Cor. 4:16).

Man's greatest need is not food, for Jesus said,

Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word
that proceedeth out of the mouth of God (Matt. 4:4).

Man's greatest need is salvation from sin. This is because of his own insufficiency and inability to save himself.

O Lord I know that the way of man is not in himself:
it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps (Jer.
10:23).

The poet has said:

Not the labor of my hands,
can fulfill thy laws demands;
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears forever flow,
All for sin could not atone,
Thou must save, and Thou alone.

That man's greatest need is salvation from sin is further seen in the fact that,

All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God
(Rom. 3:23).

It is without question that only in Christ can man find this supreme need supplied. Hence Jesus said of Himself,

I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh
unto the Father, but by me (John 14:6).

Therefore Peter said,

Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is
none other name under heaven given among men,
whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:12).

Only Christ can deliver men from Satan's power, and translate them into the kingdom of God (Col. 1:13). This

Jesus did for the sinner when He opened a fountain for sin (Zech. 13:1). Our Lord meets the sinner in baptism (Rom. 6:5). In baptism there is a union with Him and a resurrection with Him (Rom. 6:6).

Christ Is Adequate For The Test Of Temptation

Jesus is our all-sufficient need in the hour of temptation. He is our Perfect Example in combat with Satan. He met every assault of the tempter with *"It is written."* He has supplied us with *"the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,"* as our ample need in meeting the attacks of Satan. David said,

Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee (Psm. 119:11).

This we, as Christians, should do today. Paul said, Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom (Col. 3:16).

Paul further instructs us in these words:

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it (I Cor. 10:13).

That is, there will be no trial come to you but that under divine aid, you will be able to resist and repeal it. We are to remember when we are tempted, it is only because God suffers it, and not because He does it. James says,

Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death (James 1:13-15).

Only Christ is able to provide the moral power and

stamina essential to triumphant Christian living. When we fall under the weight of temptation, even then God has provided a way for our recovery through Jesus Christ. John said,

My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous (I John 2:1).

The trial has its purpose: (1) That we may receive praise, honor and glory (I Peter 1:7), (2) That we might receive joy (I Peter 4:12-13), (3) To work patience (James 1:3), (4) That we might receive a crown of life (James 1:12).

Christ Is Adequate For Every Test

Christ is adequate for every test in our cares and anxieties and sorrows, disappointments and despairs. It is the fate of all men and women everywhere to have burdens. David said,

Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee: He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved (Psm. 55:22).

Peter said,

Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you (I Peter 5:7).

Concerning Jesus our High Priest, Paul said,

Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them (Heb. 7:25).

This simply means that He will go with us in all the trials of life. There is no experience through which we pass that He will not be with us. There will never be a temptation that He will not make a way of escape. There is no burden that He is not willing to help us to bear it.

There will never be a sorrow we have that He will not feel and suffer with us, and help us to endure it. Should we not, then, continue in faithful obedience to our Lord, in grateful appreciation? He has made rich provisions for us! Put your case in His hands and trust Him to the end. Let His love constrain you. Let His goodness bind you. Let His abiding presence bless you.

Christ Is Adequate For Our Spiritual Devotion.

He said,

For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them (Matt. 28:20).

When we gather in His name we are assured of His presence. Some unsafely count heads to estimate failure or success. But Jesus counts hearts that serve Him. If Christ is in the midst no congregation is weak, poor or isolated. However people must meet the condition of His promise to be present. That condition is, to be gathered "*in His name.*" This means according to His authority, nature and for His glory. There may not always be a crowd when Jesus is present but there will be a church.

Christ Is Adequate For The Test Of Death

Jesus holds the keys to death and the grave, for He said,

I am He that liveth, and was dead and, behold, I am alive forevermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death (Rev. 1:18).

There is one destiny for all men, which is the grave. There can be no dispute with the writer of the Hebrew letter, who said,

And it is appointed unto men once to die (Heb. 9:27).

Who has the key that leads into the realm of the unseen of the Hadean world? Science, philosophy and reason have no light. Jesus has the key. He has conquered death and the grave and has *“brought life and immortality to light through the gospel”* (II Tim. 1:10). He has left a way open from earth to heaven. This way is through Him and His church. Truly He is *“the way, the truth and the life”* (John 14:6). When we come to bid the last farewell in the flesh to our loved ones who die in the Lord, it is consoling to hear the Lord say,

Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them (Rev. 14:13).

Paul said,

To die is gain (Phil. 1:21).

Christ Is Adequate For The Test Of Eternity

Some of the last words spoken by Christ to His disciples before He was led to the cross were these:

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also (John 14:1-3).

Hence heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people. In the beginning God provided everything in Eden for man's complete happiness. There was not anything that was lacking in that blissful state before sin entered the world. Likewise, when the Paradise of Eden is restored, there will be nothing lacking for our eternal happiness. Jesus is there now preparing everything necessary for our everlasting enjoyment. While Jesus is preparing the

place, it is our personal duty to prepare ourselves for that place. Truly heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people! An unprepared people would not be happy in a prepared place. This just would not be heaven. Neither would a prepared people be happy in an unprepared place that is not heaven in all its realities of eternal blessedness and happiness.

Paul said,

For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better (Phil. 1:23).

Christ is now in heaven where He *“sitteth on the right hand of God.”* There is nothing in this world that is comparable to the eternal bliss of that celestial city. Paul said,

Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him (I Cor. 2:9).

In that city that *“lieth foursquare”* the redeemed of all ages shall be safe from all sorrow, sickness, pain and death, for John said,

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away (Rev. 21:4).

Philip Schaff has said,

Who solves this mysterious problem of life? Who breaks the chains of darkness? Who removes the load of guilt? Who delivers us from the degrading slavery of sin? Who secures peace to our troubled conscience? Who gives strength against temptation, and enables us to realize our noble vocation? Who inspires our soul with love to God and man? Who, in the midst of abounding corruption and depravity, upholds our faith in man as the image of God and special object of His care? Who keeps up our hope

and courage when earthly prospects vanish, the dearest friends depart, and the future looks dismal and threatening? Who dispels the terrors of the tomb and bids us hail death as a messenger that summons us to a higher and better world where all the problems of earth are solved in the light and bliss of heaven? To all these questions, which may be hushed for a while by the follies of passion, the intoxication of pleasure, the eager pursuit of wealth or knowledge, but which sooner or later irresistibly press themselves upon the attention of every serious mind, there is but one answer: 'Lord, where shall we go but to Thee? Thou alone hast the words of eternal life, and we know and believe that Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.' Apostles and evangelists, martyrs and confessors, fathers and reformers, profound scholars and ignorant slaves, mighty rulers and humble subjects, experienced men and innocent children, all point, in this great, and all-absorbing question of salvation, not to Moses, not to Socrates, nor to Mohammed, not to philosophy, art, science, but to Christ as the way, the truth, and the life. He, and He alone, has a balm for every wound, a relief for every sorrow, a solution for every doubt, pardon for every sin, strength for every trial, victory for every conflict. He, and He alone, can satisfy the infinite desires of our immortal soul. Out of Christ, life is an impenetrable mystery; in Him, it is gloriously solved. Out of Him, there is nothing but skepticism, nihilism, and despair. In Him, there is certainty and peace in this world and life everlasting in the world to come. Our hearts are made for Christ, and they are without rest until they rest in Christ.

Conclusion

Truly we have in Jesus our Lord an adequate Christ. He is all-sufficient for every test of life, of death and eternity.

Chapter 23

What Is The Import Of *“If The Lord Wills”?*

(Cf. I Cor. 4:19)

Terry M. Hightower

In a *“Peanuts”* comic strip, there was a conversation between Lucy and Charlie Brown. Lucy said that life is like a deck chair. Some place it so they can see where they are going; some place it so they can see where they have been; and some place it so they can see where they are at present. Charlie Brown’s reply was: *“I can’t even get mine unfolded.”*

Is this your outlook on life under God’s Providence? I hope not, for the Bible view is more like this:

Frederick Nolan was fleeing from his enemies during a time of persecution in North Africa. Pursued by them over hill and valley with no place to hide, he fell exhausted into a wayside cave, expecting his enemies to find him soon. Awaiting his death, he saw a spider weaving a web. Within minutes, the little bug had woven a beautiful web across the mouth of the cave. The pursuers arrived and wondered if Nolan was hiding there, but on seeing the unbroken and unmangled piece of art, thought it impossible for him to have entered the cave without dismantling the web. And so they went on. Having escaped, Nolan burst out and exclaimed: *“Where God is, a spider’s web is like a wall. Where God is not, a wall is like a spider’s web.”*

At times both the Old and New Testaments speak of *“the will of God,”* and it is a phrase commonly used by many serious Christians today which can be used flip-pantly and constantly, whereby it comes to signify little

or nothing. When one looks at the Biblical usage of the phrase, especially in the references to it by Jesus, Paul and the author of Hebrews, he realizes that it is not superstitious “*knock-on-wood*” formula such as those used by pagan Greeks or Mohammedans. The term “*will*” as applied to God has to be understood in terms of its meaning with reference to *man*. “*Will*” is an act or process of volition; something wished by a person, especially one with power or authority; strong purpose, intention or determination; power of self-direction, or self-control; conscious and deliberate action or choice; disposition or attitude toward others. To see how this concept is applied to Deity by Bible writers, especially by observing how they relate it to: (1) the Creation of the cosmos, (2) the phenomena of the natural world, (3) the course of history, and (4) the will of man, is to be blessed with a more accurate view of and appreciation for the Great God which we worship.

Our God is purposeful, all-powerful, and sovereign in relation to His world. He has a plan for the history of the universe, and in executing it He governs and controls all created realities. God is both *transcendent over* (distinct from his world—does not “*need*” it—exceeds the total grasp of any created intelligence that is found in it), and yet *imminent in* (permeating the world in sustaining creative power—shaping and steering it in a way that keeps it on its planned course) His world. To recognize the existence of a will of God and its scriptural import is to see that the work of creation resulted from the divine will (Gen. 1:26; Psm. 135:6; Jer. 18:6; Rev. 4:11). Moment by moment the world continues or is preserved because of Christ’s “*upholding all things by the word of his power*” (Heb. 1:3) and because “*by him all things consist*” (Col. 1:17; Neh. 9:6). In God’s abundant bounty and goodwill (Matt. 5:45; Acts 14:17), He upholds His creatures in ordered existence (Acts 17:28), guides and governs all events, circumstances, and free acts of angels and men (Psm. 107; Job 1:12; 2:6; Gen. 45:4-8;

Prov. 21:1; Dan. 4:35), directing everything to His appointed goal for His own glory (Eph. 1:9-12). This view of the will of God thus excludes: Pantheism, Deism, Dualism, Inderminism, Determinism, Chance, and Fate! To understand the import of **“if the Lord will”** is to instill in oneself a definite sense of confidence that *nothing* happens outside His *“will.”* In creating a human, He made a being who also has a *“will”* which could in freedom choose to thwart the Ideal Will and/or Circumstantial Will of the Creator (but *not* His Ultimate Will).¹ The phrase **“If The Lord Will”** must be studied in this light—especially in view of God’s Circumstantial Will.

Old Testament Words For Will

The Old Testament employs several words to denote the will of God, including the Hebrew words, ‘abah, nadab, rason and ya’al. *“Abah”* or *abhah* means *“to be willing”* or *“to consent to”* and occurs over 50 times in the Hebrew Bible. Except in Isaiah 1:19 and Job 39:9, it is always used with a negation and it is usually linked with a request. The original meaning which fits best with all Old Testament occurrences is *“to show intention in a certain direction”* with the primary emphasis on the main behavioral patterns and actions in which the intention is manifested, not on the intention as a psychological factor in the inner person of God or man. God appears as the subject of *abhah* where it is used of God’s unwillingness to destroy His people owing to His love for prominent men of faith. Moses says,

And Jehovah hearkened unto me that time also: Jehovah **would not** destroy thee (Israel-TMH) Deut. 10:10).

Jehovah **would not** destroy Judah, for David his servant’s sake (II Kings 8:19).

Israel was spared during Jehoahaz’s reign because

Jehovah was gracious unto them, and had compas-

sion on them, and had respect unto them, because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and **would not** destroy them, neither cast them from his presence as yet (II Kings 13:23).

If the Lord wills to protect and preserve His people, it is obvious that He has the omniscience and omnipotence to do so!

As lord of the covenant, God also controls the activities of the enemies of his people. God hardened Pharaoh's heart so that he would not let the people go (Exod. 10:27).

Scripture says that Sihon **would not** let Israel pass yet explains that it is due to **God's** having hardened his spirit in order to deliver him into Israel's hand (Deut. 2:30).

Nadab indicates an uncompelled and voluntary movement of the will and is often linked with offerings gladly given to the Lord. In one passage, Psalm 68:9, the noun form of the word is used where God is praised for restoring His heritage by the sending of rain voluntarily. Therefore, God's will includes natural events which make up our contingent world and does not refer only to warring humans who are controlled by him.

Involved in this confession is the idea that the covenant God, Jehovah, gave prosperity but not because he was in any way bound to do so.

Rason speaks of "*willing*" that brings the doer pleasure and the verb form is often translated "*to be pleased.*" The noun *rason* carries three major shades of meaning with the primary one being the "*favor*" or "*good will*" of God (Deut. 33:16; Isa. 60:10; Psm. 5:12; 30:6,8 et al.). It also means the "*delight*" or "*acceptance*" of an individual (Exod. 28:38) and this is always in a religious or ritual sense describing the "*permissibility*" of "*acceptance*" of a gift or sacrifice (Lev. 1:3; 22:20; Isa. 56:7; et al.). The third shade of meaning attached to *rason* is "*desire,*" "*pleasure*" in the specific sense of "*will,*" as in

the “*will*” of God.

Now therefore make confession unto Jehovah ...
and do his pleasure; and separate yourselves from
the people of the land, and from the foreign women
(Ezra 10:11).

I delight to do thy will, O my God; Yea, thy law is
within my heart (Psm. 40:8).

Teach me to do thy will, For thou art my God (Psm.
143:10).

Rason is used in the sense of God’s “*favor*” in Proverbs 11:27 and 14:9. Despite its wide variety of connotations, *rason* is most important as the standard anthropomorphic expression of God’s perceptive will. It can even be God’s will that one break up an emotional social relationship with others in order to please Him.

Hapes is interesting because “*the element of ‘protection’ has crystallized out of the range of its (root-TMH) meaning*”⁵ to the basic meaning of “*feeling great favor towards something.*” Emotional overtones predominate: “*protect*” develops into an intensive “*care for,*” a joyous, affirmative “*desire,*” and finally “*have pleasure in.*”⁶ The word is used of God experiencing emotional delight in certain people.

In David’s song of deliverance, he says that God provided for him because he ‘delighted’ in him (II Sam. 22:20). The Queen of Sheba expressed a blessing to God because he ‘delighted’ in Solomon (I Kings 10:9). God is said to experience this delight toward good works of men. For instance, he ‘delights’ in his sabbath being kept and his law observed (Isa. 56:4), in ‘mercy’ and ‘knowledge of God’ (Hos. 6:6) and in ‘truth’ (Psm. 51:8). In respect to himself, God engages in activities in which he takes ‘delight’ (Psm. 115:3; 135:6).⁷

Isaiah prophetically declares that the “*delight*” of God will prosper in the hand of Jesus Christ (Isa. 53:10),

using it in reference to Christ's great interest, his business.⁸ Jesus came to do the will of His Father (Heb. 10:7-9; Acts 13:22-23) and this was his *food*:

My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to accomplish his work (John 4:34; cf. 5:30; 6:38-40).

Hapes is used in reference to the pagan King Cyrus, whom God said would perform that in which He had "*delight*" and whose "*right hand*" God had "*holden*" so that He performed the Lord's will in regard to the rebuilding of the Temple (Isa. 44:28; 45:1; II Chron. 36:21-23). As in the case of Cyrus, God accomplished His painful but divine will concerning His Son's death on the cross.

Him, being delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye by the hands of lawless men did crucify and slay (Acts 2:23).

The pagan Cyrus is used of God on behalf of His benevolent will toward Israel, and the Romans are used of God to save *everyone* from sin's wages! God's actions in history will carry out His plans and His promises as to salvation both temporally and spiritually. Imagine our Great God experiencing emotional delight in providentially delivering us from enemies, blessing us with physical items, allowing us to do good works and to worship according to His law, and for our "*mercy*," our "*knowledge of God*" and for "*truth!*"

Ya'al indicates the exercise of one's will, the exerting of oneself to do something,

...to make a volitional decision to commence a given activity ... the verb concentrates on the volitional element rather than upon emotional or motivational factors. It stresses the voluntary act of the individual's will to engage in a given enterprise, not what may have brought him to that decision.⁹

After God tells David that he will have a descendant who will

...build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever (II Sam. 7:13).

David prays to God that the Lord be willing (ya'al) to bless His descendants (II Sam. 7:29). Despite the sins of the people, Samuel says,

Jehovah will not forsake His people for His great name's sake, because it hath *pleased* Jehovah to make you a people unto Himself (I Sam. 12:22).

In both incidents, God took the initiative to choose Israel as His own people and the descendants of David as the Messianic line. God must, therefore, bless them both.¹⁰ Peter declared that Christ was the great fulfillment of the promise made to David centuries earlier though Solomon fulfilled it typically (Acts 2:30-32). New Testament authors declare Christians to be a *"holy nation, a people for God's own possession"* because of Jesus the Christ *"who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a people for his own possession"* (I Peter 2:9; Titus 2:14). If God freely willed to bless David's descendants and willed to make a people unto Himself out of the Israelites, then how much more will he exert himself in caring for us?

The delicate shades of meaning shown in these Hebraic terms set forth the interplay of motives linked with divine and human choices. There can be a willingness based upon obligation or on pleasure, as a response to a request, or simply as a voluntary, spontaneous act done by the Lord. The Old Testament expects God's people to do the will of God which He expressed as the divine expectation for human behavior in Moses' law, but above all, the Old Testament states that God does His own will in fulfilling His covenant with His people because it pleases Him to do so (Psm. 135:6; 115:3). He performs His purpose (hepes) even on His people's enemies (Isa. 48:14). God's will initiates creation, redemption, and all that happens in heaven and on

earth; and the people with whom God has made His covenant are called to live according to His will revealed in the law, wisdom teaching, and prophetic utterances.¹¹ In the last analysis, to “*delight*” (*hapes*) in doing God’s will (*rason*) is the same as having God’s law written in one’s heart (Psm. 40:8; Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 8:8-13). God’s will does *not* include him *delighting* in mere ritualism (Isa. 1:11-17), disobedience (I Sam. 15:22), or in irreverent priests (Mal. 1:10). His ultimate Will derived from His holiness and justice required His punishing the sinner (Ezek. 18:4, 24) but he does not have any pleasure (*hapes*) in the death of the wicked, wishing they would return to doing His preceptive will and live (Ezek. 18:21-23, 30-32). Peter echoes this by mentioning “*the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men*” (II Peter 3:7) which will no doubt come, and then stating that “*The Lord ... is longsuffering ... not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance*” (II Peter 3:9). With the new covenant written upon our hearts and minds, it is no wonder that we Christians can have **boldness** to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, drawing near in “*fulness of faith*” holding “*fast the confession of our hope that it wave not: for he is faithful that promised*” (Heb. 10:15-23). No wonder Peter himself urged:

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time; casting all your anxiety upon him, because he careth for you ... And the God of all grace, after that ye have suffered a little while, shall himself perfect, establish, strengthen you (I Peter 5:6-7, 10).

New Testament Words For Will

The New Testament employs two different families of Greek words to express the idea of “*will*” or “*willing*” with *boulomai* and *theio* functioning in a synonymous way. *Epitrepo* is also used in two of the five verses where the conditional formula (“If God or the Lord will/permit”)

occurs and means “to give opportunity or possibility; to permit; allow; give leave,,” but *boulomai* and *theolo* predominate. Both *boule* and *thelo* can each represent choice and inclination, and both can represent intention and fixed purpose, but *boule* and *boulemai* are always used in the sense of absolute determination (e.g. Luke 7:30; Acts 2:23; 4:28; Eph. 1:11; Heb. 6:17) when indicating the purpose of God.¹²

Boulomai, like *thelo*, is found over 100 times in the LXX and it stands in particular for *hapes* and ‘*abah*. It expresses the most varied nuances of meaning in general human volition, but it is also used for God’s will (Isa. 1:11; 53:10; I Sam. 1:25). The noun *boule* (occurring over 100 times in LXX) and means, above all, the counsel or purpose of God (Psm. 33:10-11; 73:24).

God’s purposes are trustworthy and true; Israel can therefore rely on them (Isa. 25:1). His purpose includes Israel’s salvation (Isa. 14:26; cf. also Isa. 5:19; Micah 4:12).¹³

In the New Testament, “*boulomai* denotes human volition, but also the volition of the Father (Luke 22:42; Heb. 6:17; James 1:18; II Pet. 3:9), Jesus (Matt. 11:27; Luke 10:22), and the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 12:11), thus showing their conscious will in consequence of definite reflection. *Boule* as a rule, refers to the free decision of the will which is prepared to carry it out: (1) of humans (Acts 27:12, 42; Luke 23:51); (2) of the counsel or purpose of God (Luke 7:30; Acts 2:23; 4:28; 13:36; 20:27; Eph. 1:11; Heb. 6:17). It is significant that God’s indisputable determination or will culminates in the proclamation of Christ as the fulfillment of God’s purpose (Luke 10:22; John 14:6; Rom. 1:16). *Boule* is used in Acts 2:23 and 4:28 in showing that the criminal – like death on the cross does not contradict the Father’s divine authorization of Jesus for it is God’s own purpose, foretold in Scripture. Because of the *apparent* weakness and humiliation of Christ, those who con-

sider themselves wise and clever go astray (I Cor. 1:18-25) but the Son wills to reveal His Father to “babes...for so it was **well-pleasing** in thy sight” (Luke 10:21-22).

Despite the fact that Jesus fell into the hands of Jews and lawless Gentiles in accordance with God’s will and even in view of the fact that they “*in ignorance*” killed Him (Acts 3:17), they are not absolved of the fact that they murdered the Prince of Life (Acts 2:21). They were “*ignorant*” in the sense that they were not knowledgeable of the fact that He actually was the Messiah because of their false expectations of such, but they were “*guilty*” in the sense that there was adequate evidence proving Him to be the Christ from the Old Testament, John the Baptist’s “*roadbuilding*”, and Jesus’ miracles (Isa. 53; Psm. 2: 22; Micah 5:2; Mark 1:1-8; Acts 2:22), and from the fact that He was found to be a righteous man with “*no fault*” by even the pagan (but cowardly) civil authority (Matt. 2&;24; Luke 23:14). The Jews and the Romans did not realize that the promises given to David went way beyond him to God’s plan with Jesus.

For they that dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew Him not (as God’s anointed One — TMH), nor the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning Him. And though they found no cause of death in Him, yet asked they of Pilate that He should be slain. And when they had fulfilled all things that were written of Him, they took Him down from the tree, and laid Him in a tomb. But God raised Him from the dead: (Acts 13:27-30) so that He did not see corruption, but David, after he had served his own generation *by the will of God (te tou theou boule)* fell asleep...and saw corruption (Acts 13:36).

Thus great pain and sacrifice can be included in the circumstantial “*will of God*” (cf. Luke 22:42), and this includes God’s “*permitting*” or “*willing*” sin “*in the sense that He allows sin to happen, but He cannot prevent it, given the nature of the person (man) whom He willed*

and created...(but) it is clear that God does not in any way **encourage** or affirm sin^u (James 1:13-14). The will/resolve/purpose (*boule*) of God fills up the whole content of the apostolic preaching in which there is no rule of arbitrary predestination, but “rather, in the encounter with the message (gospel — TMH) of Jesus the decision about the revealed will of God is made” (Acts 20:27-28; John 12:48), determining the accountable human’s ultimate destiny (Mark 16:15-16; cf. Acts 13:46).

In the whole of the rest of the New Testament the *boule* word-group is used only seven more times in reference to the Godhead:

Paul has the Gentiles speaking of the will (*boulema*) of God where the opponent gives the excuse: Why doth He (God) still find fault? For who withstandeth His will?” (Rom. 9:19) as if God could in any way be arbitrary or capricious or in some way obliterating man’s freewill (cf. Matt. 11:28-29) and thus His responsibility. Paul points out that the miraculous gifts of the first century derive from the one Spirit of God and that they were divided into each one severally even as He will (*boulema*)” (I Cor. 12:11) or in the freely-willed decision of the Holy Spirit. The term is used in meaning the purpose of God: “In whom (Christ — TMH) also we were made a heritage, having been foreordained according to the purpose of Him (the Father — TMH) who worketh all things after the counsel of His will...Wherein God, being *mind*ed to show more abundantly unto the heirs of the promise the immutability of His counsel” (Eph. 1:11; Heb. 6:17). Despite long years of history going by so far as mere humans are concerned, “The Lord is not slack (slow — TMH)...but is longsuffering to us-ward, not *willing* (KJV: “wishing” ASV) that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (II Pet. 3:9), with the obvious import that man can in freedom thwart the *Ideal* and *Circumstantial Will* of God (i.e. that He never sin at all and after sinning that He come back to God by obedience to Christ). Of the Father’s “own will (*boulema*) he brought us forth by the word of truth (the revealed will of God or gospel — TMH) “be-

cause God Himself is the unalterable one (James 1:17) whose gracious will to do so (i.e. to save all those who obey Christ until death — Heb. 5:9; Rom. 6:4-11; Mark 16:16) cannot be overthrown (John 10:27-28; Matt. 25:46; cf. Luke 16:26).

The Greek words *thelo* (wish, want, desire, will, take pleasure in); *thelema* (will, intention); and *thelesis* (will) constitute the other main family expressing the idea of “will” in reference to Deity. *Thelema* occurs in the LXX some 25 times and stands mainly for the divine good-pleasure (Isa. 40:8; Jer. 9:23; Mal. 1:10), and also for the will of God (Psm. 103:21; Isa. 44:28). It especially stands for *doing* the will of God (Psm. 103:21; 143:10). *Thelo* is found 207 times in the New Testament and *thelema* 62 times with the latter being the more theologically significant word since it is generally used of the will of God. Paul uses these terms especially to describe the real source of the whole event of salvation in Christ:

who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us out of this present evil world, *according to the will of our God and Father...having foreordained us unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ unto Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will...making known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Him...in whom also we were made (by the provision of and our obedience to Christ’s gospel — TMH) a heritage, having been foreordained according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel (boule) of His will (thelema) (Gal. 1:4; Eph. 1:5, 9, 11).*

On the basis of His comprehensive saving will, God’s people have had their eyes opened to the wisdom of creation in Christ, which is now culminated and made manifest in the communities formed out of both Jews and Gentiles: *the churches of Christ* (Rom. 16:16; Eph. 1:6-7, 10,13, 22-23; 2:14-22; 4:4). Paul notes that his apostleship has its origin in the providential will of the

Father (I Cor. 1:1; II Cor. 2:1; Eph. 1:1; II Tim. 1:1).

Paul further uses *thelo* in reference to man's "willing" (Rom. 9:16), but goes on to explain that God's volition (*thelo*) is the decisive factor, since His saving will is the necessary pre-condition for all human volition (Rom. 9:18). "*God accomplishes His will in history precisely in that He harnesses both obedient and obdurate into His saving plan.*"¹⁵ God's goal is not centered upon the "vessels of wrath" for He has just "endured" them in order to demonstrate His great wrathful power and holy personality, in order to reveal His Circumstantial Will of grace upon "vessels of mercy" (i.e. the saved — TMH; Rom. 9:21-23). In view of the circumstances of man's sin, God "*would (thelo) have all men to be saved, and come to a knowledge of the truth*" (I Tim. 2:4). God was pleased to reveal His glory in Christ (Col. 1:27) to His saints who make up the New Testament church (Col. 1:24-26) because they obeyed the gospel message, yet God still wants the salvation of all men (Col. 1:28; Titus 2:11; I Tim. 1:15; Heb. 2:9). "*The New Testament church does not acknowledge a double predestination in the will of God, whereby from the beginning one section of humanity is excluded from salvation*",¹⁶ it is just that not all are *willing* to accept His conditions, depriving themselves either by the self-established criterion of their perverted reason or because of their self-indulgent preference for sin.¹⁷ The "*will (thelo) of the Lord*" can be known and understood (Eph. 5:17) so that we can behave correspondingly (Eph. 5:14-18).

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service. And be not fashioned according to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect *will (thelo)* of God (Rom. 12:1-2).

Paul praises the congregations of Macedonia for

their loving, sacrificial, monetary liberality stemming from their giving “*their own selves to the Lord, and to us through the will (thelo) of God*” as the ultimate source (II Cor. 8:5). No one in the miracle-possessing early church had any right to be arrogant since such gifts arose, not from man’s will, “*but now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased (thelo) Him*” (I Cor. 12:18).

Paul gives an extended treatment of the great battle that goes on inside men between their own will (affected by fleshly desires) and the “*law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus*” (i.e. the gospel which sets forth the special revealed will of God [Rom. 7:15ff]). In many places *thelo* assumes the weight of apostolic authority: “*But I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple unto that which is evil*” (Rom. 16:19; cf. I Cor. 7:32). Therefore, it is easily seen that in this case (of inspiration) God’s will is Paul’s will and Paul’s will is God’s will, and **not** Paul’s personal desire or “*law of sin*” which was in his members (Rom. 7:23). No wonder he could proclaim:

If any man thinketh himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him take knowledge of the things which I write unto you, that they are the commandment of the Lord. But if any man is ignorant, let him be ignorant (I Cor. 14:37-38)!

Thelo and *thelema* play a special role in John’s gospel with repeated stress laid on the fact that Jesus, the One who is sent, does **not** act according to His own will (John 5:30a; 6:38a), but (as we have already seen) that the will of the Father is accomplished in the work of the Son (5:30b; 6:38b). Jesus is absolutely and entirely the bearer of the Father’s will (John 4:34) and it is God’s will that the Savior not lose those who are appointed for “*life*” (i.e. those who perceive salvation in Jesus and take hold of it in obedience to it — John 6:39-40). The *synecdoche* “*faith*” is simply doing of the divine will

(John 9:31; I John 2:17) as is specifically demonstrated in the congruency of human will with the divine will in the avenue of prayer (I John 5:14-17). Salvation itself is impossible on the mere basis of man's will, but it is possible as a divinely originated possibility as over against some sort of natural stimulation of the will of man (John 1:17; 3:8; I Pet. 1:23; II Pet. 1:21). The Son of God "*giveth life to whom He will*" (John 5:21; 6:27, 57) on the basis of "*if any man **willeth to do His will**, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God*" (John 7:17).

Apart from Matthew (*thelema* occurs six times for the will of God), the Synoptics and Acts rarely use the *thelo* word-group for a direct description of God's will. Jesus' emphatic but often ignored "*Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that **doeth the will** of my Father who is in heaven*" (Matt. 7:21; 12:50; Mark 3:35) simply means that an individual can and must be responsive to God's revealed standards and desires. There is no division made between a will of God as to ethics and a will of God as to His saving purpose for mankind. There is only one all-embracing will of God with which alone corresponds an equally comprehensive attitude toward life by the believer (Matt. 21:31).¹⁸ The Model Prayer's: "*Thy kingdom come. Thy **will be done** in earth, as it is in heaven*" (Matt. 6:10) and Jesus' actual prayer in Gethsemane (Matt. 26:39; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42) wherein He prayed "*O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup (of humiliation — of both physical and spiritual agony and suffering — TMH) pass from me (i.e. not happen — TMH)*" show us the greatest declaration possible that the human will is to be subject to the purpose and intentions of the Father, no matter what the cost: "*nevertheless, **not as I will, but as Thou wilt.***" Anyone who would reject self-denial and self-sacrifice as not being involved in Christianity is **not** grasping the Biblical doctrine of God's will!! One had best be careful before

pronouncing: “*God just would not require **that** sacrifice of anyone!*” Jesus’ statements are not to be understood as some sort of Calvinistic recognition of being irresistibly controlled by some unalterable power, but rather as an active affirmation of His (and our) human will to the Father’s revealed plan in order for it to be realized:

I lay down my life for the sheep... Therefore doth the Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one taketh it away from me, but I lay it down of myself, I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment received I from my Father (John 10:15-18; Matt. 21:31).

Even when it was foreseen and revealed by the Holy Spirit that Paul should not set foot in Jerusalem in the sense that, if he did so he would be delivered into Roman hands (Acts 21:4, 10-11), Paul responds to pleas by Luke and others to not go by answering: “*What do ye, weeping and breaking my heart for I am (imitating Christ — TMH) ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem **for the name of the Lord Jesus.***” And when he would not be persuaded (cf. Matt. 16:21-24 and John 18:8-11 where Peter sincerely but ignorantly attempts to stop the Lord from going to the cross), *we ceased (beseeching Him — TMH), saying, **The will of the Lord be done***” (Acts 21:13-14). It was in the plan of the Father to appoint Paul “*to know His will, and to see the Righteous One, and to hear a voice from His mouth*” so that Paul could (freely) “*be a witness for Him (Christ) unto all men*” of which his free decision to be immersed for remission of his sins was the primary step (Acts 22:14-16; cf. Acts 9:15-20). Do **you** have this attitude of Christ and Paul toward your Father’s will? Are **you** truly willing to suffer for His name’s sake, recognizing the existence of the entire cosmos is contingent upon His will, that certain phenomena of the natural world may endanger your life, that the course of history is replete with God-permitted persecution of believers and that

God will not completely override the will of men and women to spare us “*chastening*” in order that we may profit by becoming by such persecution “*partakers of His holiness*” (Heb. 12:1-11)?

Jesus used *thelo* frequently to stress His authority, power, and compassion. To the leper who said Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean...He stretched forth His hand, and touched him, saying, I will (*thelo*) ; be thou made clean. And straightway his leprosy was cleansed. (Luke 8:2-3). Then Jesus called His disciples unto Him, and said, I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will (*thelo*) not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way (Matt. 15:32). To the two blind men asking for His mercy, He first stood still and then He called them, and said, What will (*thelo*) ye that I shall do to you?... (He) touched their eyes: and immediately their eyes received sight” (Matt. 20:32-34).

In these cases the Lord was freely persuaded to line up His will with the will of His creature!! He also demanded of any one who would: (1) follow after Him, (2) enter into life, or (3) be “*great*” in the kingdom, to make a decision of the will on the basis of His authority (e.g. Matt. 16:24f; 19:17, 21; Mark 10:43f).

A terrific study can be had in further writings of the New Testament where forms of this word-group are found: *thelo* in Heb. 10:5, 8; James 4:15; I Pet. 3:10, 17; II Pet. 3:5; Rev. 2:21; 22:17; *thelema* in Heb. 10:7, 9f, 36; 13:21; I Pet. 2:15; 3:17; 4:2, 19; II Pet. 1:21; I John 2:17; 5:14; Rev. 4:11; and *thelesis* once (Heb. 2:4, of gifts of the Spirit distributed according to God’s Spirit)...The interpretation of Psalms 40:7ff, in Hebrews 10:5-10 corresponds with the Johannine thinking concerning the will of God and its fulfillment in the work of the One who has been sent...The principle is here enunciated by which Christ comes into His world (Col. 1:16-17; John 1:1-3 — TMH) and by which His whole earthly life is determined: exclusive fulfillment of the will of God

(vv. 7, 9), i.e. *repudiation of the cultic sacrifice* (vv. 5ff), *fulfillment of Scripture* (v. 7) and *the presentation of His own life as a sacrifice* (v. 10; emphasis mine — TMH). By so doing, Christ did away with the old Mosaic law so that He could establish the Father's "*will*" in the second covenant: By which will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all (Heb. 10:10). Jesus' sacrifice has so completely fulfilled the will of God that a transformation of man in sanctification has become possible so that the "*God of peace*" who raised Jesus can make us perfect in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ; to who be the glory for ever and ever. Amen (Heb. 13:20-21). This transformation, i.e. fulfillment of the promise, is again the "*doing of the will of God*" by the believer (10:36). Very much as John the doing of the will of God consists of *undivided obedience to this will* (emphasis mine — TMH).¹⁹

Peter, in particular, stresses that this undivided obedience to God's will can and likely will, include suffering:

For it is better, *if* the will of God should so will, that ye suffer for well-doing than for evil-doing...And who is he that will harm you, if ye be zealous of that which is good? But even if ye should suffer for righteousness' sake, blessed are ye: and fear not their fear, neither be troubled... Because Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God (I Pet. 3:17, 13, 18). Forasmuch then as Christ suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; that ye no longer should live the rest of your time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but *to the will of God*...Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial among you, which cometh upon you to prove you, as though a strange thing happened unto you; but insomuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, rejoice; that at the revelation of His glory also ye may rejoice with exceeding joy...Wherefore let them also that suffer *according to the will of God* commit their souls in well-doing unto a faithful Creator (I Pet. 4:1-2, 12-13, 18).

Thus, the “*will of God*” is used in a number of senses. It expresses the divine purpose, in view of man’s freedom of choice, as fixed and unalterable. It expresses God’s general and revealed standards for human behavior (ethics). It expresses God’s involvement in human life: (1) *directly*, including the miraculous during the Old Testament and New Testament times (but which ceased by the end of the first century) and (2) *indirectly*, including His call through the written word (II Tim. 3:16-17) for Christians to perform specific actions and to operate upon basic ethical principles as set forth therein, and also including His *indirect, non-miraculous “shaping”* of our personal lives. Paul is quite obviously not calling for strict miraculous “*deliverances*” in his solicitations to brethren for their prayers to God in his behalf in such verses as Romans 15:30-31 so that he might come to them “*in joy through the will of God*” (Rom. 15:32; cf. II Thes. 3:1-2). He knew much better than most that our omnipotent God can effect delivery through many indirect means (II Tim. 3:11; 4:17-18), up to and including escaping from the governor of Damascus by humans helping him down through a window in a basket by the wall (II Cor. 11:32). Perhaps much of our misunderstanding of God’s Providence stems from our trying to learn beforehand the exact details of His indirect, non-miraculous shaping of our lives. All efforts to attain this type of knowledge end up in futility, bitterness and confusion for:

Such people spend much time poring over the book of providence, wondering why God should have allowed this or that to take place, whether they should take it as a sign to stop doing one thing and start doing another, or what they should deduce from it. If they should end up baffled, they put it down to their own lack of spirituality.²⁰

But Scripture teaches us that the man of God realizes that God does and allows things which are quite inexplicable to the finite human mind at least as to explaining

exactly *why* something either did or did not happen as *we* may have *wanted* or *expected* Him to act. God does not necessarily want *us* to have *his* perspective, and Packer likens this to the control tower of a railroad yard where one has a bird's eye overview of all the happenings in the yard. He offers an alternative illustration of driving a car when he says:

What matters in driving is the speed and appropriateness of your reactions to things, and the soundness of your judgment as to what scope a situation gives you. You do not ask yourself why the road should narrow or screw itself into a dogleg wiggle just where it does, nor why that van should be parked where it is, nor why the lady (or gentleman) in front should hug the crown of the road so lovingly; you simply try to see and do the right thing in the actual situation that presents itself. The effect of divine wisdom is to enable you and me to do just that in the actual situations of everyday life.²¹

If the Lord Will/Permit

When the Ephesian Christians asked Paul to stay longer with them, he consented not, and said, "*I will return again to you if the Lord will*" and he set sail from Ephesus (Acts 18:21). He threatened those in Corinth who were "*puffed up*" as though he was not coming to deal with their situation by saying, "*But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will*" (I Cor. 4:19). He went on in the letter to express his desire for more than just a passing visit with them, declaring "*I hope to tarry a while with you, if the Lord permit (epitrepo)*" (I Cor. 16:7). The Hebrew author expresses a similar outlook concerning the going beyond first principles of faith in Christ and "*pressing on unto perfection*" or growing and maturing as every Christian ought (Heb. 6:1-2) by his statement "*And this we will do, if the Lord permit*" (Heb. 6:3). Perhaps James gives us the most complete idea of this Biblical phrase when he attacks those of us who act, live, and think as if we could presumptuously dispose of the future in a sort of self-willed independence of God in

daily life:

Come now, ye that say, Today or to-morrow we will go into this city, and spend a year there, and trade, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. What is your life? For ye are a vapor that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will (*thelo*), we shall both live and do this or that. But now ye glory in your vauntings: all such glorying is evil. To him therefore that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin (James 4:13-17).

James exposes what is *right*, namely the need to operate as did Paul and the author of Hebrews: *The need to make all of life's plans in the light of ultimate reality*—if not, then it is *sin*. It is wrong for us to divide up our life into the sacred and the secular so that our faith in Christ is not a vital factor in all of existence and decision-making! Though the principle of verse 17 can be applied to other situations, in this context it refers specifically to the refusal to relate faith to all of life! James and Paul use the phrase “*if the Lord will or permit*” to mean a recognition of their own limitations in knowledge (i.e. “*whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow*” – James 4:14) and existence (by challenging us with the thought of mortality in the form of a question – “*What is your life?*” – James 4:14). They know that it is only by means of the Lord's will that the world is here and that He now preserves it—that Deism and Continuous Creation are false ideas. God is continually willing the cosmos to exist and is concerned about and involved with its continuation (cf. an auto with no speed control or a power tool with no locking device). They also know that God is **not** like a big, celestial Repairman—only being needed when things go **wrong**! No, He is imminently at work in His creation, constantly willing it to remain and employing indirect means (and possibly in their case sometimes even direct means like Paul's ability to strike Elymas blind—Acts 13:11—or some other miracle) to

achieve His ends even when all goes well. We ought to think about the transitory and uncertain nature of life—that we are but a puff of smoke or steam that appears and then vanishes (James 4:14b).

James uses the conditional form (*ean* and the aorist subjunctive) when he, in view of the insecurity of life and our lack of knowledge compared to God's, urges us all to make our plans with a recognition of our utter dependence upon Jehovah: "*For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall both live and do this or that.*" In Acts 18:21 Paul shows us that it is all right to make temporal promises like "*I will return again*" whereby one has no way of *absolutely* knowing by mere human means if he will fulfill them. Temporary promises have to do with the intent of our hearts and minds and ought to be reasonably possible of accomplishment in view of known circumstances. Unable to foresee possible contingencies,²² Paul refrains from making his promises absolute. If the Lord will/permit for Paul's ministry obviously includes doing everything "*by faith*" (Rom. 10:17) and this subdivides itself into matters of *obligation* which **must** be done (i.e. **Go preach the gospel**) and matters of *option* (i.e. **How? Where? When?** unless this is specified by the Lord as it sometimes was in Paul's day). These optional matters must be ethically in God's will, but then there exists a more pragmatic side where human choice is involved. These choices must be made in the light of (1) Bible principles, (2) present circumstances, as related to (3) previous experiential knowledge (i.e. has it been tried before? did it fail or work?). Paul's previous experiences of promising a return but having "*Satan hinder*" him (I Thes. 2:18), plus his own unknown circumstances in Ephesus (I Cor. 15:31-32; 16:9), make him properly cautious in his promising to come shortly to Corinth (4:19). The Lord might intervene and direct him elsewhere (perhaps miraculously in his time or non-miraculously as in ours). Paul, Silas, and Timothy had tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of

Jesus did not permit them (Acts 16:7). God's plan was for them to begin evangelizing farther west into Europe. He knew better than to tell the church at Thessalonica that he would definitely make it to them and instead prayed night and day "*exceedingly that we **may** see your face, and **may** perfect that which is lacking*" in their faith (I Thes. 3:10). This latter part adds in another element which was also recognized by the Hebrew writer (5:11-6:19): the human element. They realize that they cannot succeed unless their readers cooperate because the success of what is to be accomplished hinges also on them. Hebrews 6:4-20 shows that "*If God permits*" can imply a number of things in their leaving the first principle doctrines or "*baby milk*" to press on unto maturity or "*solid food*". It may include (1) stern warnings or rebuke about their susceptibility to apostasy as a **fear** motive to shock them out of their lethargy (6:4-8; cf. 5:11-14), and (2) tender entreaty and encouragement (6:9-20) (which stresses their love, loyalty, and ability) to give them the motive of *assurance*. (He recalls their ministering to the saints here and later reminds them of their hospitality to travellers, their loyalty to their elders, and their generosity to the needy—13:2, 7, 16). The possibility of failure is implied and the possibility of success is affirmed—but what *ought* to be done, by the will or grace of God *can* be done!

Thus, "*if God permit*" implies that God may supernaturally aid a first century author in the writing of the material which follows his warnings in order to carry them to proper maturity. It also implies that man can naturally exercise his will to become "*dull of hearing*" (Heb. 5:11) whereby either refusing or agreeing to carry *himself* to the proper maturity (by teaching others and by partaking in more "*solid food*" studies in the oracles of God, i.e. instead of "*milk*" required by the spiritually immaturej). Hebrews 6:7-8 likens men unto land soaking in the rain and either bringing forth (A) suitable "*herbs*" (spiritual growth and maturity) as it ought, or (B)

“thorns and thistles” (lack of spiritual growth, and thus, immaturity) as it ought **not** to do. God’s Circumstantial Will is ethically speaking man’s Option (A), but He allows or permits man to be man and thus such a being may freely choose Option (B) which brings rejection and ultimately, a final end of separation from God in a place of burning (6:7-8). The author and other Christians with him bring great pleasure to bear by stating that they are convinced or *“persuaded of bet-ter things”* of these brethren; i.e. still having the hope and persuasion that they will choose Option (A).

Thus, God’s providence or foresight does not include (1) forcing His divine will as to growth upon Christians nor does it preclude (2) rejection and cursing here in this life and ultimate burning in a place of torment. The inspired Hebrew writer is **not** going against but rather in agreement with the will of Almighty God (6:3) in attempting to influence these Christian recipients or readers by telling them his own moral/spiritual expectations for them (6:9, 11-12). Even when there has been a marked decline in spiritual growth in fellow members of Christ’s church, as in these readers, we ought to expect of them better things which are in keeping with salvation (6:9). Such confident optimism may be non-gimmickry and strong if based upon promising facts such as our fellow member’s previous work and love displayed for God’s name (e.g. their past and present ministering to the saints). God is not so unrighteous as to *“forget about”* His promised blessing for proper growth in spiritual maturity and for ministry to His people (*“saints”*–6:10). No, through His word we can see His providential care toward weak Christians being carried out through our fellow Christians: (1) *expectations* for us or peer pressure for good (our spouse? elders? preacher?) (2) *bringing to our remembrance* the fact that God notices and has regard for our creaturely obedience and sense of propriety, (3) nostalgically *reminding us* of our previous and/or even continuing (albeit sluggish) work

and love done for His cause (calling on our desire for consistency), (4) *pointing out* our promised reward (6:11) and (5) *hitting us* with the fact that other humans just like ourselves zealously through faith and patience inherited the promises of God like Abraham (6:13), Abel (11:4), Enoch (11:5), Noah (11:7), and others (11:32-12:2). “*If the Lord will*” obviously includes touching the heart of the weak and the wayward with a quick trip into the past concerning their love to God and help to God’s saints, whatever that specifically may be in their case history. Here is the author of Hebrews argument:

I. If you out of love did His divine will back then and still continue to a degree to do it, then you can show the same diligence unto the fullness of hope even to the end (death) when your hope will be gloriously realized in Christ and you will inherit the unshakable promises of God just as did Abraham, Abel, Enoch, Noah, and others.

II. You out of love did His divine will back then and still continue to a degree to do it.

III. Therefore you can show the same diligence unto the fullness of hope even to the end (death) when your hope will be gloriously realized in Christ and you will inherit the unshakeable promises of God just as did Abraham, Abel, Enoch, Noah and others.

For the Christians here to have the fulness of hope, it must be *personal* assurance based upon the coming glory promised by Christ.

To exercise diligence in regard to the full assurance of that hope is with all diligence to examine *the divine grounds* (evidence - TMH) *on which our assurance rests. This will make sure and certain, fully so in all respects, and will thus make our hope strong like a flame that blazes steadily to full height*²³ (emphasis mine — TMH).

To carry out God’s Providence toward weak Christians

through 1-5 mentioned above is in the “*Lord’s will*”, but the strongest “*pull*” or influence available within God’s Circumstantial Will is to expound on the fact that our promised reward is “*anchored*” in the fact of the shed (“*in our behalf*” — KJV of 6:18-20), all-atoning blood of Jesus, our Great High Priest “*seeing He ever liveth to make intercession*” for us (7:25). If God permits us to live and thus to do so, we can providentially overcome our general spiritual lethargy (with its loss of zeal/lack of confidence/faltering hope) by presenting a vision of Christ, perfected through suffering, and opening the new and living way for us into the sanctuary of heaven (10:19-24). **Do you have the attitude toward life that is meant by the descriptive expression of “*If the Lord will*”?**

Endnotes

1 **The Warren-Matson Debate**, (Jonesboro, AR: NCP, Inc., 1978), pp. 107-110.

2 **Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament**, Vol. I trans. by John T. Willis (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 24. Hereafter **TDOT**.

3 Ibid, p. 26.

4 **Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament**, Vol. II ed., by R. Laird Harris (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), p. 554. Hereafter **TWOT**.

5 **TDOT**, Vol. V trans. by D. E. Green (GR: Eerdmans, 1986), p. 93.

6 Ibid.

7. **TWOT**, p. 311.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid, p. 357.

10 Ibid.

11 Lawrence O. Richards, **Expository Dictionary of Bible Words**, (GR: Zondervan Pub. House, 1985), p. 627.

12 Ibid.

13 **Dictionary of New Testament Theology**, Vol. III ed. by Colin Brown (GR: Zondervan Pub. House, 1978), p. 1016. Hereafter **DNTT**.

14 Thomas B. Warren, **Have Atheists Proved There Is No God**, (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Co., 1972), p. 35.

15 **DNTT**, p. 1020.

16 Ibid.

17 **Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words**, (Old Tappan, NJ: F. H. Revell Co., 1981), pp. 217-18.

18 **DNTT**, p. 1022.

19 Ibid, p. 1023.

20 J. I. Packer, **Knowing God** (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1973), p. 92.

21 Ibid, p. 93.

22 R. C. H. Lenski, **The Epistle to the Hebrews and the Epistle of James**, (Columbus, OH: The Wartburg Press, 1946), p. 194.

23 Study Paul's listing of such in II Cor. 11:23-12:10! It includes events both good and "bad", esp. misery brought about by such things as (1) *inanimate nature*, (2) *animal life*, (3) *other individual men* — cf. II Tim. 4:14, (4) *nations*, (5) our own *weaknesses and failures*, and (6) the seemingly *chaotic nature* of the *distribution of suffering*. The reader is urged to study **Have Atheists Proved There Is No God** listed above and also Warren's **Our God—A Sun And Shield For Troubled Hearts**.

Chapter 24

Can The Providence Of God Involve Prayer Without Miracles?

Joseph Meador

On August 20, 1893 at the old Broadway Christian Church in Louisville, Kentucky, J. W. McGarvey delivered two sermons on the providence of God.¹ These sermons, (entitled respectively, “*Divine Providence: Joseph*” and “*Divine Providence: Queen Esther*”), along with twenty-two other discourses, were destined from their initial presentation (from June to September 1893) to become classics in the homiletical literature of the restoration movement.²

J. W. McGarvey and his contemporaries³ believed firmly in the active providence of God. As they wrote about this vital doctrine they sought to distinguish clearly between a genuine miracle and divine providence. They uniformly held to the understanding that during Patriarchy, the Mosaic Economy, and during the first Christian century, God used genuine miracles to confirm His Word revelation to man. Now however, He operates through His self created natural and mediate laws to accomplish His will over which He alone is Sovereign.

As such, these restoration pioneers were constantly seeking to avoid the extremes of Calvinism⁴ and Arminianism which were both very much in vogue in the theological circles of the day. Too, these nineteenth

century Christian leaders were equally opposed to any form of Deism which would lead one to ultimately adopt a fatalistic view of God, man and man's destiny.⁵

Miracles And Providence

In regard to making an accurate distinction as to whether an act was miraculous or the result of divine providence, Moses E. Lard offered some challenging insights as he reflected upon an article written by J. B. Grubb (who used the pseudonym Philip). The title of Grubb's article was "*The Miraculous and the Providential*" and it appeared in the July 1865 issue of **Lard's Quarterly**. Lard made the following editorial observations that:

Philip's article inaugurates in the Quarterly the discussion of a subject which every thinker will readily admit to be at once important and difficult. That there have been miracles, the Bible affirms; that there is providence, no Christian denies. This makes the topics important. Yet, neither that nor this is the subject of formal Bible decision. This makes their discussion difficult. Yet we believe they should be discussed ... In order to do this, the first thing necessary is the true definition of a miracle. I have never yet seen one that I felt to be satisfactory; nor do I believe that such a one is in print. What is a miracle? Who can answer precisely, giving neither too much nor too little? Again: what is the exact definition of the providential? What are we talking about when we are talking about the thing? If definable, let us have the definition; if describable, let us have the description. Then let the line, deep and bright, be drawn between the miraculous and the providential – between the non-providential.⁶

A Miracle Defined And Its Relation To Natural Law Examined

Augustine, in his work *Contra Faustum*, made the following comments concerning a genuine miracle and

its relation to natural law:

For we say that all portents are contrary to nature, but they are not so. For how is that contrary to nature which happens by the will of God, since the will of so mighty a Creator is certainly the nature of each created thing? A portent, therefore, happens not contrary to what we know as nature That is, however, no impropriety in saying that God does a thing contrary to nature, when it is contrary to what we know as nature. For we give the name nature to the usual common course of nature; and whatever God does contrary to this, we call prodigy, or a miracle. But against the supreme law of nature, which is beyond the knowledge both of the ungodly and of weak believers, God never acts, any more than He acts against Himself.⁷

In a similar, yet contemporary line of thought, C. C. Crawford has noted that there are four essential characteristics of a true miracle. First, an essential aspect of a miracle is that it be a space-time incident. He continues by stating:

That is, not a matter of inward experience, intuition or illumination; but an observable event, an event palpable to the physical senses; in short, an incident that can be seen and noted by eyewitnesses. Being thus an actual incident, it has an historical setting.⁸

Second, a true miracle must be wrought for a religious purpose. Thus it must have been produced to serve the purpose of God, not man. Crawford observes:

In this sense all miracles are alluded to, in Scripture, as having been wrought by God Himself, the worker of the miracle being merely the instrumentality through whom God operates. Being an observable incident, a miracle is designed to serve as an objective proof to all who witness it, that the worker of it is divinely commissioned as a religious leader or teacher. Miracles are, so to speak, the credentials which God confers upon all whom He sends out as His ambassadors. Thus Moses was given power to

perform miracles in Egypt, to attest the divine origin and authority of his mission (Exod. 4:1-9), and thus the Lord worked with the Apostles 'and confirmed' the word by the signs that followed (Mark 16:20). Cf. Hebrews 2:4 – 'God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders, and by manifold powers, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will.'⁹

The third essential characteristic of a miracle is that it must have been an event produced by the immediate agency of God. C. C. Crawford reflects upon the fact that a miracle is:

(1) Not an event without a cause, since it has for its cause a direct volition of God," i.e., an exercise of the Divine Will. (2) Not a sudden product of natural agencies – a product merely foreseen, by him who appears to work it; it is the effect of a will outside of nature" (Strong, **Systematic Theology**, p. 117). (3) Not a providential occurrence, i.e., one occasioned by the operation of God's will in and through natural forces and processes exclusively, such as, e.g., the shining of the sun, the transmutations of energy into matter, the combining and recombining of atoms, etc.; but an event produced by an immediate application of a force superior to nature. We must not fail to keep in mind this necessary distinction between the strictly providential and the miraculous.¹⁰

The fourth essential characteristic of a miracle, maintains C. C. Crawford, is that such must be an event resulting "*the transcendence of the processes of nature, for the moment, by a Force superior to nature.*"¹¹ He further observes:

(1) It has been said by Hume for instance, that 'a miracle is a violation of the laws of nature.' This is not true. Miracles in the true sense of the term, are effected by the operation of the Power which created nature and therefore controls it; and by the application of a Force that is superior to natural law. The miracle is wrought when this superior Force transcends for the moment the forces and proc-

esses of nature, for a special divine end. (2) To illustrate: when you go out into the country for a visit to the old homestead, how you do enjoy going to the old well and drawing up a refreshing drink of cold water in 'the old oaken bucket'! Now it is contrary to natural law that water should rise upward, yet the application of a superior force to the rope to which the bucket is attached, temporarily transcends in this case the natural law involved. The boy who throws a ball into the air does not violate or suspend the laws of nature in so doing; rather he brings to bear upon the forces of nature a superior force which temporarily transcends them according to an exercise of his own will. Gravity will draw a piece of iron downward, but the power in a magnet will transcend gravity and draw the piece of iron upward.¹²

Is a Bible miracle, then, to be defined as an incident which could be satisfactorily interpreted by us as a natural incident if we were familiar with all the natural forces and processes involved in the working of it? No. A Bible miracle is an event which, though not violating the laws of nature, the laws of nature if fully known, would not, without the additional exercise of the Divine Will, be sufficient to account for fully.¹³

The Doctrine Of Divine Providence

The order or methodology of thought in the study of any Christian Doctrine is marked by the following commonplaces:

Deus existens, God existing; his being, attributes and threefold personality; Deue volens, God willing or forming his eternal plan; Deus agens, God in the successions of time executing the plan he had formed in eternity.¹⁴

Therefore, the doctrine of Providence (not unlike other doctrine) when analyzed from this narrow model, may be examined with a view of its practical utility from either the second or third areas while keeping in mind that its derivation is from "*Deus existens*." The English

word “*providence*” is derived from the Greek word “*pronoia*” and from the Latin term “*providentia*” meaning foresight.¹⁵ T. H. L. Parker has noted that:

Providence is one of the words which does not occur in the Bible, but which nevertheless represent truly a biblical doctrine. There is no Hebrew equivalent for ‘providence,’ and the Greek word translated thus, *pronoia*, is used only of human foresight (Acts 24:2; Rom. 13:14).¹⁶

In a very broad sense the doctrine of providence “*affirms that God is not only the Creator, but ‘by him all things consist’ (Col. 1:17), and that ‘in him we live, and move and have our being’ (Acts 17:28).*”¹⁷ In a more specific sense it is established that:

Providence is the beneficent outworking of God’s sovereignty whereby all events are directed and disposed to bring about those purposes of glory and good for which the universe was made. These events include the actions of free agents, which while remaining free, personal and responsible are also the intended actions of those agents. Providence thus encompasses both natural and personal events, setting them alike within the purpose of God.¹⁸

Blessings Derived Through Providential Means

In examining the doctrine of Providence from the Scripture one sees a distinction between general providence and special providence.¹⁹ General providence is used to describe God’s beneficent goodness on all of His creation (cf. Mat. 5:45), while special providence is manifested toward those who do His will (cf. Matt. 6:33).²⁰ Thus, in studying this second aspect of providence, (i.e., special providence), one can more clearly understand how God answers authorized prayer without the use of miracles.

God’s special providence can be readily seen in

both Old and New Testaments where many times He has sought to work through the weakness of human insight. In other words, those situations in life which seem to be impotent to the mind of man, (as far as positive productivity is concerned), God uses to accomplish His will (cf. I Cor. 1:18-31). Thus, Joseph, who is cast into a pit and sold into bondage, rises to power through his faithfulness unto God (Gen. 37:23, 24; 50:20); the prophet Jeremiah, who had been cast into a dark cistern, and while suffering from other maladies, rises to wider spiritual influence and offers praise unto God by uttering the immortal words: *“Great is thy faithfulness”* (Jer. 38:6). Peter and John, both imprisoned for the sake of truth, become even bolder in their proclamation of Jesus as Christ, thus equipping the gospel message with the militancy of human commitment (Acts 4); and the early church, after having been dispersed and scattered abroad due to severe persecution, found a great opportunity to go about preaching the Word (Acts 8).²¹ All of these providential results were accompanied by preceding prayer. Yet, the element of the truly miraculous is noticeably absent from each.

The point has now been demonstrated that God has answered the prayers of those in fellowship with Him, through His special providence, without the necessary use of a miraculous manifestation. Therefore, a passage such as Matthew 6:33 can be understood in view of the conditional doctrine of fellowship whereby God is committed to the continued welfare of faithful believers, through the means of special providence, as long as they have the right attitude of obligation (*“But seek ye...”*), in the right order (*“...first”*), toward the correct object (*“His Kingdom, and His righteousness”*).

A passage such as James 5:14 can be properly appreciated only when we keep in mind that God, in harmony with His Divine will, through special providence, *“by means of His natural laws (i.e., through his various healing techniques available today) does hear,*

and answer and heal."²² Along this same line Guy N. Woods has well stated:

Evidently, for a limited time, and for a special purpose, God ordained that when the foregoing conditions were met, healing, in the apostolic age, occurred. That it was not widely followed or even then intended to apply to all saints, is clear from the fact that dear ones sickened and died, and others suffered great continuing affliction. (Acts 9:32-43; Phil. 2:19-20; I Tim. 5:23.) Paul was continually beset by a "*thorn in the flesh*," Timothy wrestled with a stomach ailment, and Trophimus was left behind at Miletus sick.

Is it proper to pray for the afflicted today? Indeed so! Will God hear and answer such prayers? We have the solemn assurance of Christ that he will. (Matt. 7:7ff.) Does this suggest that he will answer every prayer precisely in the manner in which we request it? No. What then may we expect? Our loving Father will, in harmony with his divine plan, and for our good, work out every situation, to the ultimate triumph of his people, and to the glory of his name among men. To this end we should strive fully to comply with his will, and acquiesce in the judgment of him who doeth all things well!²³

Finally, a passage such as James 1:5-8 can be understood in light of the fact that God will provide a way (through providence) whereby one can know truth. The first requisite is to have a strong desire to know truth (a desire of the will, John 7:17; a desire like unto physical hunger, Matt. 5:6). The second requisite is the desire to study diligently for this truth in the only place wherein it is attainable, i.e., God's word revelation (II Tim. 2:15; John 8:32; 17:17). Third, one must have the desire to make application of this truth with the ability to use it effectively; hence cometh wisdom (Col. 1:9; Prov. 9:10; Psm. 111:10).

In each of these cases, man's responsibility to God is stressed. The unchanging truth regarding special providence is that when man does his part, according to

God's Word, then God, in fashion as a Father, provides for the necessities of man that best suit his (man's) needs under the Lord's watchcare. The constant goal in such providential care is the eternal salvation of the soul involved. Therefore, Paul's comments in Romans 8:28, when exegeted with a view to the remedial system, become even more precious to God's children.

Endnotes

1 In 1893, the year in which McGarvey delivered these sermons, the Broadway Christian Church (the McGarvey's home congregation) was non-instrumental. Brother McGarvey served as preacher for the Broadway church from January 1871 until 1882. He also served as an elder there unto 1902 at which time the question of using instrumental music (the organ) was put before the Broadway congregation for a vote. Before the initial vote took place however, J. W. McGarvey and his wife withdrew their membership from the Broadway church. After their departure, the majority of the members decided to adopt the regular use of the organ as a part of its worship. It should be noted that while he would not "*hold membership*" in a church which used the organ, Brother McGarvey would preach and hold evangelistic meetings for churches that did. (Cf. **Moses Lard: That Prince Of Preachers** by Kenneth Van Deusen, Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Company, 1988, pp. 240-241. and **The Christian Scholar: A Biography Of Hall Laurie Calhoun** by Adron Doran and J. E. Choate, Nashville: Gospel Advocate Publishing Company, 1985, pp. 49, 50.)

2 These lessons are contained in the volume entitled simply: **McGarvey's Sermons**. They have been more recently re-published by Gospel Light Publishing Company, Delight, Arkansas, 1975.

3 The contemporaries of McGarvey who wrote on the doctrine of Divine Providence included: Alexander Campbell in "*The Christian Baptist*" and "*The Millennial Harbinger*" as well as in his book **The Christian System**; Robert Milligan in **The Scheme of Redemption** and **Reason and Revelation**; H. Christopher in **The Remedial System**; Benjamin Franklin in **The Gospel Preacher, Vol. II**; Moses E. Lard in **Lard's Quarterly** and David Lipscomb & J. A. Harding, et al., in the *Gospel Advocate*.

4 Alexander Campbell in his text **The Christian System**, (cf.

chapter VII, “*Man As He Is*”) published in 1835, taught Calvinism in regard to man’s nature. H. Christopher in his text, **The Remedial System** (published in 1876) reviewed, in part, this teaching and made the necessary Scriptural corrections.

It ought to be remembered, in charity to Mr. Campbell, that when he published **The Christian System** he was making a transition from the hyper-Calvinistic thought, commonly held to in that day (i.e., in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries). The high view of Calvinism (especially of the middle nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in America) was best represented in the school of thought known as the Princeton Theology. The Princeton Theology was embodied in the teaching of systematic theologians Archibald Alexander, Charles Hodge, A. A. Hodge, Benjamin B. Warfield, and J. Gresham Machen all of Princeton Theological Seminary. In his text: **Popular Lectures on Theological Themes** which was presented in 1887 to a ladies class at Princeton Seminary, A. A. Hodge gave the familiar and typically Calvinistic view of the doctrine of Providence by stating that: “*The word PROVIDENCE means, first, to see beforehand, and then to exercise all that care and control which God’s infinite provision of his own ends and his knowledge of his appointed instrumentalities may suggest.*”

5 “*Deists,*” according to N. M. deS.C. Cameron “conceived of God as detached from the present workings of the universe, since he had created it and then left it to operate like a machine. Providence asserts the personal involvement of God in every turn of human affairs, and his constant upholding of all natural process. Natural law therefore represents merely the constancy and regularity of the divine purposes. The natural order no less than the human expresses God’s personal control.” In a discussion of Fatalism, Cameron notes that: “This pagan notion is regaining wide currency through popular astrology. While providence personalizes nature, fatalism de-personalizes man. His free actions are free no longer, since the horoscope’s predictions (unlike the prophet’s) make no allowance for personal response. Providence never denies free personal agency, though it asserts a higher order of purpose alongside it;” from “*Providence*” by N. M. deS.C. Cameron in **New Dictionary of Theology**, Sinclair B. Ferguson and David F. Wright, editors, Downers Grove, IL.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988, p. 541.

For a concise description of the evolution of deistic thought consult the **Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature** by John M’Clintock and James Strong, 1868, Vol. II, pp. 730, 731. For a contemporary discussion of deism, consult the article “*Deism*” by David Pailin in **The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology**, pp. 148-150, or the article entitled “*Deism*”

by M. H. MacDonald in the **Evangelical Dictionary of Theology**, pp. 304, 305.

6 “*The Miraculous and the Providential*” by J. B. Grubb, in **Lard’s Quarterly**, Vol. II, July 1865, Lexington, KY., p. 349.

7 Augustine, **Contra Faustum**, XXVI, p. 3.

8 Crawford, C. C., **Survey Course in Christian Doctrine**, Vol. IV, Joplin, MO.: College Press Publishing Company, 1980, p. 283.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid., p. 284.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid., p. 284, 285.

13 Ibid., p. 286.

14 Hodge, Archibald, Alexander, **Popular Lectures on Theological Themes**, Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1887, p. 35.

15 “*Providence*,” in M’Clintock, John and James Strong, **Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature**, Vol. VIII, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Company, 1970, p. 707.

16 “*Providence*” by T. H. L. Parker in **Baker’s Dictionary of Theology**, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981, p. 426.

17 “*Providence*” by M. H. Tucker in **Great Doctrines of the Bible**, Knoxville, TN.: 6608 Beaver Ridge Road, 1980, p. 193.

18 Ibid., N.M. deS. C. Cameron in **New Dictionary of Theology**, p. 541.

19 T. W. Brents, in his text **The Gospel Plan of Salvation**, makes a distinction between “*general providence*” and “*special providence*,” p. 505.

20 It is interesting to observe that some passages combine both general and special providence. For instance, Psalm 8:4 discusses God’s general providence as manifested in cosmology as

well as pointing out that special providence, in this case, applies to man's redemption through Christ.

21 Hendriksen, William, **New Testament Commentary: Philippians, Colossians and Philemon**, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985, pp. 68, 69.

22 Woods, Guy N. **Questions and Answers**, Henderson, Tennessee: Freed Hardeman College, 1976, p. 143.

23 Ibid., pp. 142, 143.

How Can The Apparent Prosperity Of Atheistic Nations Be Compatible With Proverbs 14:34?

Perry Hall

I feel deeply grateful and greatly honored to be given the above assignment and challenge in this first annual **Power** lectureship, as I ponder the providence of God and deal with that which might puzzle many. I will leave it to others in this series to define providence in its intricacies, lest we be too redundant.

Those who believe in the God of the Bible gladly accept the working of His providence in His world. We will never be able to comprehend every working of God's hand in the affairs of men as He works out the purpose and plan for man, His highest earthly creation. But we cannot deny the government, care and preservation contained in Divine providence. Nor does it puzzle us to discover that righteousness exalts a nation and sin is a reproach to any people.

We shall proceed through logical steps to develop what we believe will clear up any misunderstanding one might have with regard to the prosperity and plans of atheistic nations in a world governed by God.

We shall make seven basic points in the body of this presentation in order to arrive at our conclusion. They are:

1. All Nations For All Time Owe Their Existence To God.
2. God Is Concerned For All His Creatures.
3. All Men Of All Nations Are Governed By God.
4. All Men Of All Nations Are Moral Creatures And Free To Choose.
5. God Allows Evil Nations To Continue For A Time.
6. God Can Use Evil Nations Providentially To Help Fulfill His Righteous Purpose.
7. God Will Ultimately Destroy All Evil Nations.

Let us with proper awe and trembling pursue the possible problem that may puzzle many, as we investigate the seeming prosperity and intimidation of atheistic nations.

I. All Nations For All Time Owe Their Existence To God

In the idolatrous city of Athens, Paul declared to the polytheistic areo-pagus,

The God that made the world and all things therein, he, being Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is he served by men's hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he himself giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; and he made of one every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed seasons, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek God... (Acts 17:24-27a).

This passage shows the establishing, by the one true and living God, individual nations of earth. He has determined **when** they would exist, exactly **where** they would exist and **why** they would exist. They were created to seek God.

Bible history reveals that God determined that He would establish for His purposes a nation, Israel, through which He would bring a Savior of all men into the world. This Savior would become King of an eternal kingdom, a holy nation, gathered out of the nations of the earth

(Dan. 2:44; Matt. 28:19-20; I Peter 2:9). That nation or kingdom we know as the church of Jesus Christ (Matt. 16:18-19; Col. 1:12-14).

In order to fulfill the plan of the ages, Daniel foretold of rising kingdoms and their future in the Providential hand of an omnipotent, omniscient God. Each one would play out its part in the great plan of God without surrendering its freedom of choice. Next let us see that:

II. God Is Concerned For All His Creatures

James declares,

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning (James 1:17).

These gifts include those of a **material** and **spiritual** nature. A portion of God's goodness is seen in His general Providence in the realm of material blessings for the nations. To the pagan men of Lystra Paul declared concerning the living God who made heaven, earth, sea and things therein,

He left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness (Acts 14:17).

Jesus challenged His disciples to love their enemies as well as their brethren, just as the heavenly Father does,

That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust (Matt. 5:45).

In Him, all men live, move and have their being (Acts 17:28a).

After the flood, when Noah had built an altar and offered burnt offerings,

...the Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake ... while the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease (Gen. 8:22).

In His providence, God would bless His creatures with harvest. Only in certain situations of great evil, when He would chastise to correct, would He temporarily withhold these blessings. In His Providential goodness He provides for even His animal creation (Psm. 104:10-28; 147:8-18). Jesus said,

Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? (Matt. 6:26).

All of creation is daily dependent upon God for life and its necessities. The entire universe holds together through the power of Christ, **who** created it (Col. 1:15-17), **who** upholds all things by the Word of His power (Heb. 1:3) and **who**, through His providence preserves them all (Neh. 9:6). From the creation, we are able to perceive God's eternal power and deity (Rom. 1:20). The order, design and laws of the physical or natural realm of creation declares the existence of the Designer and Lawgiver. Please note:

III. All Men Of All Nations Are Governed By God

All men of all nations are accountable, due to their creation as free moral agents and are subject to God's law, which governs them. King David declared that God is the governor of the nations (Psm. 22:28). God has absolute sovereignty in the affairs of men. As God governs the nations through the reign of law, rulers are ordained to be upholders of that law for the protection of the good and punishment of the evil (Rom. 13:1-7).

God's moral principles are found in the New Testament.

In the interpretation of one of King Nebuchadnezzar's dreams, Daniel declared,

...that the living might know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men (Dan. 4:17, 24-26).

Before he explained the first dream, after its secret had been revealed to him, he praised God by saying,

Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his: and he changeth times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom to the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding: he revealeth the deep and secret things: he knoweth what is in the darkness, and the light dwelleth in him (Dan. 2:20-22).

Even Nebuchadnezzar was forced to admit that God

...doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, what doest thou? (Dan. 4:35).

We see God's providence at work.

Because men are free to choose the good or evil, they are not always righteous rulers, nor righteous nations. We shall develop this next.

IV. All Men Of All Nations Are Moral Creatures And Free To Choose

Just as there is the natural or physical order of the universe, perceived empirically by the physical eye, there is also the moral or spiritual order perceived by the eyes of our moral understanding (Eph. 1:18). The moral order or design in man declares the moral nature of man. Any careful observation of man will reveal this moral nature. Some of the principles governing the moral nature

will become apparent through observation, but Divine Revelation has revealed, not only the Designer and Originator of man's moral nature, but His nature, out of which comes His law. Man's moral nature has its origin in the moral nature of God who created man in His own image (Gen. 1:26ff). God's law today is the New Covenant.

As we have already observed, God governs the material creation and moral realm through law: material creation operates without choice, but man was created to be a creature of choice, therefore, free to choose good or evil. When God's laws are transgressed, individually or nationally, that is sin (I John 3:4). It is clear from God's word that nations can stand guilty before God, as a community of individuals, and "*receive in themselves that recompense of their error which is due*" (We will discuss more of this later). Absolute standards exist by which all moral judgments of life are to be measured. In Proverbs 14:34, the wise man declared,

Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people.

The righteousness that exalts a nation recognizes that man must submit to the righteousness of God and be held accountable to God's standard of right and wrong (Matt. 25:31ff). The wise man further declared,

It is an abomination to kings to commit wickedness: for the throne is established by righteousness (Prov. 16:12).

For nations that walk in the way of righteousness there is continued life, but there is only death in the way of wickedness (Prov. 12:28; 10:16-17).

The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God (Psm. 9:17).

All through God's word He has promised to exalt those that do right and punish those that do wrong. Right and

wrong are determined by the very nature or character of God. The Light that lights the path of the righteous is God Himself.

God is light and in Him is no darkness at all (I John 1:5b).

This light and law are found in the gospel.

In the Warren-Flew debate, Dr. Flew, in response to Dr. Warren's questions about the objectivity of value, responded with a slightly adapted quotation and question from one of Plato's dialogues. The question Flew proposed was raised in the dialogue, *Euthyphro*:

Are the things which are good, good because God approves those things, or is it the case that God approves of those things which are good because they are good.¹

Thus, Flew sought to entrap Warren with an old medieval "problem." But Warren showed that neither of the alternatives would do. He said:

...they do not constitute a proper dilemma because goodness flows from the Ultimate Good, who is God. Goodness flows from the very nature of God. It is neither that God is *under* the good nor that God is *above* the good but that good flows from God. The will of God is the very essence, as it were, of the nature of God; that is, the will of God is not *under* a law and it is not *above* an arbitrary law. Dr. Flew's alleged dilemma is not really a dilemma.²

Thus, brother Warren showed that there is not some law above God that is greater than God nor something under God that was arbitrarily given by God, so that had He wished, God could have just as easily promoted the things that He condemns. God is not arbitrary or whimsical in His government of men. His government is based upon the unchanging standard of His own eternal righteousness, holiness and justice (Mal. 3:6; Heb. 6:17). The Psalmist stated of God,

Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne; mercy and truth shall go before thy face (Psm. 89:14).

Of the scripture, brother Ed Wharton observed,

This passage insists upon (1) the moral nature of God, and (2) the moral order of the universe ... The very foundation of Jehovah's throne is righteousness and justice ... In order for God to be true to His own just and righteous character He must exercise a certain amount of rule over the nations. Cf. Prov. 14:34. Why does righteousness (moral) exalt a nation while sin reproaches? For it is either in line with or in rebellion against God who raised it up, who Himself either exalts or judges. This confirms and vindicates the fact of moral standard, that standard being God Himself. The revelation of that standard for all is recorded in the Scriptures, 'For all live unto him' (Luke 20:38).

God, in keeping with His eternal purpose to save man from the consequences of his own sins, which God foresaw, has created

...an environment in which to develop moral spiritual character ... God knew how to create a world which would provide for man an environment which was as good as any possible for the purpose of enabling man to be truly free ... in which he could best develop.⁴

This development is contingent upon the choices man makes. This leads us to observe that:

V. God Allows Evil Nations To Continue For A Time

As man exercises his free choice, even to do evil, he is free to work with his hands and earn his bread by the sweat of his face (Gen. 3:19). Living in a world blessed by rain and sun, fruitful seasons and harvest made possible by a God who is concerned for all of His

creatures, even atheistic nations can prosper, and in some cases, if they so choose, they are allowed for a period to intimidate much of the world through the power they have accumulated. This is allowed only in keeping with the working out of God's eternal purpose. And, it is only temporary. Men who do not want to retain God in their knowledge cut themselves off from the righteousness that exalts a nation. When a nation gives up God, God gives it up to do those things not fitting, that naturally follow from the choice of sin. A nation sinks lower and lower into depravity. Where it once had a semblance of moral fiber and power that provided the strength and cohesiveness for its society, within the home and market place, corruption that grew from within eventually caused its collapse so that often the intimidator became the intimidated. History has repeated this process over and over again. In time, God sometimes uses other nations as His policemen to punish the intimidator. God's wrath has been clearly revealed from heaven against all nations and individuals that forget Him (Rom. 1:18-32). This wrath is expressed against the reprobate mind and within the scope of God's providence, it is brought upon a nation as its cup of iniquity is filled. When the seven nations of Canaan reached the point of sin's saturation, God kept His land promise to Abraham and used the nation from Abraham's loins to punish and take the land.

A nation through genuine repentance can reverse this providential process of punishment. Divine revelation reveals that God has the sovereign right to do as He wills with His own creation. But the moral element in Biblical teaching shows that the Divine action for or against nations are determined, not by mere caprice or cruelty, but by regard for character. The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord concerning the parable of the potter shows that God's actions are contingent upon the actions of a nation. God declared,

At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation,

and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; if it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them (Jer. 18:7-10).

Thus it is seen that it is not too late to expect the forgiving mercy of God, so long as it is not too late for man to repent. Thus, Nineveh was granted more time when it repented under the preaching of Jonah. But God's promises are as conditional as His threats. A change on man's part from fidelity to apostasy will be met by a change on God's part from mercy to wrath. Nineveh was eventually destroyed because its repentance did not last.

Thus we see, in the above, how long a nation continues is contingent upon its respect or disrespect for moral principles. If and when it is destroyed, it is responsible for its own destruction (Hosea 13:9). It makes the choice to live or die (Deut. 30:19-20; Jer. 21:8; Ezek. 33:11). While the choice is being made, if men and nations are truly free (and they are), it must be possible for nations to misuse their blessings and thus, intimidate and mistreat other nations. Many of us have lived during the terrible days of the Nazi holocaust in Europe in which six million of our fellowmen were horribly put to death. In murdering this vast number of Jews, every righteous and godly precept was violated. Men, women and children were slaughtered by the most inhumane and devilish way that depraved minds could dream. The morally degenerate and bankrupt nation of Germany sought to justify its despicable crimes on the basis that it violated no German law. But moral men saw the error of such reasoning, in that they realized that there is a law higher than that of any nation's. That law is God's law revealed in the New Testament of Jesus

Christ, to which all men of all nations are now accountable.

It is a well-known Biblical fact that God cannot commit sin nor does He tempt any man to do evil (I John 1:6; Jas. 1:13-15). He cannot deny His own holy nature (I Pet. 1:15; II Tim. 2:13). It is another fact of divine reality that God could not give man freedom of choice and prevent man from sinning *“without so changing man’s nature that he would no longer be man.”*⁵

“It seems incredible that the leaders of one ethnic group would do to another ethnic group what the German Nazis did to the Jews at such extermination camps as Belsen and Auctwitz during World War II. Many have asked, ‘Why did not God prevent this?’

*“If man is to be truly free, it **must be possible** for such things to happen.”* **It should not therefore puzzle believers to see nations which espouse an atheistic philosophy to temporarily prosper and grow to such power that they could intimidate much of the world.** *“Since man is a free moral agent, he is free to act carelessly, ignorantly, irrationally, lustfully, maliciously, etc...The Nazis could not have been truly free moral agents if they had not been free to set up and operate such places as Auschwitz and Belsen.”*⁶

History has been full of atheistic nations, who of thier own choice, have perpetrated much evil upon the world. But for this God is not blameworthy. Man was created upright, but he has sought out many evil inventions (Eccl. 7:29). He has misused his free will. Man, therefore, and not God, is to blame for the rise of evil nations. We should also note that:

VI. God Can Use Nations Providentially To Fulfill His Righteous Purpose

While I would not be so bold to declare how God has always used evil nations in modern times; that he has and does, cannot be refuted. As Wharton declared:

The principle of God's immutability, coupled with the fact of his working in and among the nations, as recorded in the Bible, establishes as a working principle God's sovereign use of all nations for all time. Neither a change of covenants, as effected at Calvary, nor the cessation of miracles would bring such principle dealings to a close. The moral government of God demands it continue to the end.

It will be established again and again in this lecture-ship that God has used the good and evil among men to further His divine purpose. Israel stands as a prime example of a nation being used to accomplish God's eternal purpose to save man. Egypt, a nation that God had used many times for His own purpose and glory, nurtured the nation of Israel until God called His people out of Egypt with a mighty hand. When Israel had come into the promised land and proved to be an unfaithful wife, He chastened her with six oppressions from other nations during the period of the judges. When Israel had gone so far in her rebellion against God, their destruction and captivity by the nation of Assyria was foretold and fulfilled (Isa. 5-7; II Kings 17:1-18). Assyria became God's "*chopping axe*" to cut down the ten northern tribes. Yet, Assyria came in the pride of his own heart and therefore, would be punished when he had finished God's assigned task (Isa. 10:6-7, 12).

When the remaining tribes known as Judah had filled their cup of iniquity, God brought the nation of Babylon against her as he had announced (Jer. 25:8-9; II Chron. 36:17-21). The Medo-Persian Empire would destroy Babylon and chastened Israel would return after 70 years captivity to their homeland (Isa. 44:24-45:8). The Greeks and Romans, as God has foretold, marched across the field of human history and perished in God's Providence after they were used by God to bring about the fulness of time, the advent of His only begotten Son as Savior of the world. The King of kings and Lord of lords would, upon His death and resurrection, establish His eternal kingdom (Dan. 2:44; Isa. 2:2-3; Luke 1:32-33;

Matt. 16:18-19; Acts 2; Col. 1:13; Rev. 1:9).

There can be no doubt that God has, from the beginning of the great panorama of human history, raised up and used nations to fulfill His divine purpose in this world. This has been done without violating the free moral agency of a single human being. *“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments; and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord: or who hath been his counsellor?”* (Rom. 11:33-34).

All the facts of God’s wonderful Providence force us to the final point:

VII. God Will Ultimately Destroy All Evil Nations

We have already seen iniquity’s cup overflow for nations of the past, and be brought down by the powerful hand of God. They had derived their power from God (John 19:10-11; Rom. 13:1), and they willfully misused the power. Few nations in history have learned that their national security lies in their respect for, and submission to God and His moral righteousness. The world empires of Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome are gone. Israel failed to live up to her God-given potential and rejected the Messiah. God divorced her, abrogated her law, and established His New Testament church and covenant for all men.

Today, Christ rules two kingdoms; His eternal kingdom, and the kingdoms of the world. His authority over all nations was foretold, as He would be given the nations for his inheritance, the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession and that He would break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces as a potter’s vessel (Psm. 2:6-9; 110:1-2, 6). The New Testament shows Jesus to be the fulfillment of these promises (Matt. 28:18; Acts 2:34-36; 13:32-33). The church today joins in with her brothers and sisters of the first century

to call upon our Lord to overrule in the affairs of men, that great and effectual doors of Divine Providence might be opened (Acts 4:23-31). The faithful *“offer themselves willingly in the day of His power while the nations of men reject His rule and the Lord strikes through kings in the day of His wrath and wounds the head in many countries”*(Psm. 110:1-6).

Over a quarter of a century ago I visited in Hitler's Germany. I saw cemeteries that were filled with hundreds of thousands of men. I viewed ruins and monuments, museums and battlefields. I saw Eagle's Nest at Berchtesgaden, where Hitler laid his plots to rule the world. At Nuremburg I visited Soldiers' Field where he whipped into futile frenzy the youth of Germany and caused them to believe they were a super race. I remembered the news reels of boyhood days that I had viewed, where they gave their dedicated vocal salutes to this mad man. Outside of Nuremburg, I saw the foundations and partially built walls of a gigantic stadium, a mile long, where Hitler was to assemble his victorious troops for a great victory celebration at the end of World War II. The stadium was never completed. The Third Reich was to live a thousand years, but lasted only twelve. Christ smashed and crushed their plans, power and pursuits, as His rod of iron, the allied might, was wielded in His almighty Providential hand.

It is sad to see the nation of our birth, America, slip down the slimy slopes of degradation, as others have gone before. America, if she does not turn, will be brought down to hell. God is no respecter of persons.

Faithful Christians, members of the Lord's church, fulfilling the challenge and commisison of Christ, are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. As the kingdom of Christ, we are engaged in a gigantic conflict. We know our destiny if we are faithful. We know our end if we fail. With His Providential guidance, we must strive to fulfill the Great Commission and be faithful in our living of the faith.

Conclusion

The fact that we continue to benefit from God's general Providence of abundant material blessing should never be interpreted as the complete endorsement of God. He may be simply waiting. It is the blessed nature of our God to be longsuffering (II Pet. 3:9; I Cor. 13:4). That longsuffering can be man's salvation (II Pet. 3:15). While God's longsuffering waits to "see" whether the cup of iniquity will be emptied by repentance or filled to overflowing rebellion, even atheistic, humanistic nations can prosper, intimidate and be used for God's purposes before they are destroyed. That God has the sovereign right to do this is seen in the fact that:

1. All Nations For All Time Owe Their Existence To God.
2. God Is Concerned For All His Creatures.
3. All Men Of All Nations Are Governed By God.
4. All Men Of All Nations Are Moral Creatures And Free To Choose.
5. God Allows Evil Nations To Continue For A Time.
6. God Can Use Evil Nations Providentially To Help Fulfill His Righteous Purpose.
7. God Will Ultimately Destroy All Evil Nations.

Endnotes

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What Does Proverbs 3:21-26 Teach About The Providence Of God?

Raymond Hagood

Perhaps no Bible subject more nearly mirrors a Christian's understanding of God's relationship to the world in general and to Christians in particular than the subject of God's providence. It is this writer's humble opinion that substantial numbers of Christians do not really believe in the providence of God. Many hover dangerously close to the doctrine of deism.

This deficit in their understanding is perhaps the product of two things — **first**, an ignorance of the Bible's vast teaching about God's love, concern, and care for mankind, and, **second**, an inability to distinguish between God working in a miraculous fashion in the affairs of men and God working through His natural laws. Often brethren may fear that references to God's providential care are tantamount to saying that they believe in modern day miracles and the apperceptive operation of the Holy Spirit on men's hearts.

The consequences of such misconceptions about how God works today are devastating to one's faith. Instead of confidently relying upon God, these Christians often find themselves paralyzed by inordinate fears of the future and a thousand other things. Trust is replaced by doubts, hope by pessimism, courage by timidity and faith by incredulity. These brethren become

loners,” denying themselves of God’s precious promise never to leave us or forsake us (Heb. 13:5).

Further, a failure to recognize that God tends to His people has a sterilizing and abortive effect upon prayer. To deny God’s regard for and support of the godly is to controvert one of God’s resources in answering our supplications to him. James offers this instruction in James 1:6, 7:

But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering: for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.

This passage clearly states that when a man prays, he must have faith or his prayer is completely ineffectual.

The concepts of God’s providence and faith in God are inextricably linked. Acceptable faith requires a clear understanding of and belief in God’s safekeeping, *“for he that cometh to God must believe that he is and that he is a rewarder of them diligently seek him”* (Heb. 11:6). To have a diminished concept of the care and protection of God decreases our faith, and a lack of faith impairs our understanding of God’s provision for our needs and our well-being.

For these reasons and many others a proper understanding of God’s promises of preservation is vital to Christian living. Faithful service to God involves some difficult tasks, and no child of God can afford to deny himself of the great blessings to be had in the assurances that God watches over and sustains his people. All Christians need the comfort of Romans 8:28 guiding their lives — *“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”*

Our particular study centers on the guardianship of God as it is described in Proverbs 3:21-26. These powerful verses plant a majestic image of the Godhead’s

solicitude for his people. This text, therefore, becomes a source of great comfort and encouragement to all who look *“for a city which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God”* (Heb. 11:10).

Definitions

The word *“providence”* as it relates to God has been defined many times in this series of lectures. For the sake of continuity and in order to deal adequately with the text assigned, it is absolutely essential once again to define this key word. Wilbur F. Tillett offers this definition:

The doctrine of Divine providence, therefore, has reference to that preservation, care and government which God exercises over all things that He has created, in order that they may accomplish the ends for which they were created.¹

McClintock and Strong give us this understanding of the word: *“A term importing the wisdom and power which God continually exercises in the preservation and government of the world, for the ends he purposes to accomplish.”*² Robert C. Hampton expresses it in this way:

Providence is God’s foresight and unceasing care for his people as he has promised. The word providence is self-explaining: ‘Provide-ence.’ And providence is shown in the provisions God makes through and in accordance with his laws.³

The Greek word *“pronoeo”* means *“to take thought for. provide.”*⁴ God’s omniscient power allows him to know what is necessary to provide for the sustaining of the world in general and his people specifically. Yet God’s knowledge and actions do not in any way violate free moral agency, nor do they operate outside the confines of God’s own laws.

It is this ability on the part of God to know the needs of mankind, His determination to sustain His creation,

and His great love for His creation generally and His people specifically that provide the impetus for God's providential care. So far from the Delat's concept that God created the world and left it to run itself, the Bible teaches that God is minutely involved in overseeing the world and providing those elements necessary to accomplish His purposes.

Wisdom's Relationship To Providence

Proverbs 3:21 says,

My son, let not them depart from thine eyes; keep
sound wisdom and discretion.

The word "*son*" is derived from the Hebrew word "*Ben*." It is used by Solomon here to refer to young men in general.

"*Them*" in this verse refers to wisdom and discretion. In the book of Proverbs the words "*wisdom*," "*understanding*," "*discretion*," and "*knowledge*" are used somewhat interchangeably because they share similar meanings.

Solomon presents a strong injunction in this text not to let sound wisdom and discretion depart (escape) from one's mind and heart. Additionally, the hearers are admonished to keep (watch, guard) these two treasures.

The reason for Solomon's strong mandate in regard to wisdom and discretion can be clearly seen by understanding the significance of wisdom itself as it is used by Solomon in the book of Proverbs.

In Proverbs 1:2-4 the wise man presents the purpose of the Proverbs themselves. His explanation is as follows:

To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding; to receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment and equity; to give subtlety to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion.

The word “*know*” is derived from the Hebrew word “*yada*.” Strong defines this word to mean “*observation, care, recognition*.”⁵ The purpose of the Proverbs was to allow the ready to observe, recognize and understand wisdom, instruction, understanding, etc. Additionally, verse three requires that one receive (to take hold of) the instruction of wisdom, justice, judgment and equity. Justice entails the idea of being right, judgment of rendering a correct verdict and equity of fairness.

The word “*wisdom*” therefore is used by Solomon to encapsulate the concepts of instruction (discipline and correction), discretion (to distinguish), and understanding (to perceive the meaning of). The *Pulpit Commentary* offers this excellent observation concerning the meaning of wisdom as used by Solomon:

Wisdom, then, is not the merely scientific knowledge, or moral philosophy, but religious knowledge or piety towards God; an appreciation of what God requires of us and what we conversely owe to God Wisdom will, of course, carry with it the notions of knowledge and insight.⁶

The prudence of Solomon’s instruction to lay hold on sound wisdom and discretion is now clearly seen. Godly wisdom is absolutely essential in having and sustaining the correct relationship to God. Without it, one cannot distinguish properly between the vital issues of life. One is unable to perceive the meanings of the critical matters associated with God’s will for mankind, and, tragically, the discipline and instruction which are indispensable in making the proper readjustments in thinking and living never materialize.

So important is wisdom in God’s scheme of things that Proverbs 3:19 teaches that God used wisdom in the creation of the world. Wisdom was used by God not only to create the world, but also to sustain the world and mankind.

Those who keep sound wisdom and discretion have many wonderful benefits and blessings. Two of these are

described in verse 22. *“So shall they be life unto the soul, and grace to thy neck.”* Clarke comments on verse 22 in this way: *“These” - wisdom and discretion - “bring life to the soul and are ornamental to the man who acts in this way.”*

A third and equally important benefit of laying hold on wisdom and discretion and not letting them escape is that one then has access to God’s special protection in the form of His great providential care. Verse 23 through 26 describe the nature of this special vigilance and solicitude afforded to those who faithfully lay hold on godly wisdom and who do not let it escape. In order to do this, one must know God’s will and obey it. Therefore, this promise of special care and provision is not meant for just anyone. It is limited in its scope to those who faithfully serve God and enjoy fellowship with him.

“Walk In Safety”

An integral part of God’s providential care is the assurance of a safe walk through life. *“Then shalt thou walk in thy way safely, and thy foot shall not stumble”* (Prov. 3:23).

There are certain requirements to guarantee that one can walk safely, and God has furnished these ingredients. First, there is the requirement of proper instruction to show one the correct way and to help a person avoid the blind alleys and false turns. That guidance comes in the form of the Bible. *“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path”* (Psm. 119:105). God has given unto mankind his verbally inspired written word that is able to supply all of man’s needs and also to supply the ultimate source of guidance (II Tim. 3:16, 17). Those who walk in accordance with God’s word are assured a safe journey to heaven.

Secondly, because of his great love God has provided a scheme of salvation for mankind. *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that*

whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). This system provides the means whereby man's sins can be forgiven, and man can once again enjoy fellowship with God and all the residual blessings associated with it.

The promise of a safe walk does not insure that one will never encounter obstacles and hardships. It does mean, though, that God has provided the instrumentality to overcome all of these problems and difficulties. Because of God's providential care in supplying those things necessary for salvation, He has given to mankind all that is needed to guarantee victory over evil and a secure passage to eternal life for all those who take advantage of His preparations by obedience to His will. As the apostle Paul well said, "*But thanks be to God, which has given us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*" (I Cor. 15:57).

"Thou Shalt Not Be Afraid"

Further evidence of God's providential care is seen in these words, "*When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid: yea, thou shalt lie down and thy sleep shall be sweet. Be not afraid of sudden fear, neither of the desolation of the wicked, when it cometh*" (Prov. 3:24, 25).

Fear is a terrible and intimidating emotion. Its ability to enslave the most intrepid person and encompass him in a sea of pusillanimity is legendary. Katherine Mansfield well said:

Oh, flock of thoughts with their shepherd Fear
Shivering, desolate, out in the cold. That entered
into my heart to fold!⁸

Cervantes gives this penetrating insight into the nature of fear when he said, "*Fear is sharp-sighted and can see things under ground, and much more in the skies.*"⁹ Fear of death, loneliness, illness, ridicule, dark, poverty and a thousand other dreads permeate the lives of most.

In Matthew 8:23-26 and Mark 4:35-40 the Bible records an incident that occurred on the sea of Galilee. A terrible storm arose while our Lord was asleep in the ship. The disciples woke Jesus and caustically complained to him, "*Master, carest thou not that we perish?*" Their question was such as if to attribute to the Lord's indifference to their dangerous plight. He rebuked them with these words, "*Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?*" Our Saviour styled their fear as little faith, and such was an accurate description.

Like these disciples many people evidence their lack of faith by fear of things past, present and future. Whether from horror of a nuclear war, fear of AIDS, or trepidation over the alleged "*green house effect*", the average person is haunted with dreads and anxieties, but not Christians, because it is sinful for followers of Christ to be afraid in this way. "*Why is it wrong for a child of God to be afraid of these things?*" one may ask. This is because if there is anything that is taught with special emphasis in the Bible, it is God's care for his people and their ultimate victory over all, including death. The Hebrew writer says, "*So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me*" (Heb. 13:6). When fear grips the heart and tears the soul and makes one afraid to face tomorrow, this is prima facie evidence of a distrust in God's promise of providential care to his children.

Therefore, Solomon makes it very clear that because of God's care for his children, we need not fear when we go to sleep at night. When one enjoys the proper relationship with God, sleep will be restful and renewing. There will not be restless nights, brought on by worry, anxiety and dreads.

Adam Clarke offers an insightful view of verse 25:

They are not apprehensive of any sudden destruction, because they know that all things are under the control of God: and they are satisfied that if sudden destruction should fall upon their wicked neighbor,

yet God knows full well how to preserve them.¹⁰

Of course, it is not the case that God exercises total control over all things. God certainly does not violate a person's right of choice by exercising some coercive influence upon him. God, however, does exercise control over all of his creation in every matter that does not affect free will.

Even when destruction comes upon the wicked, God preserves His faithful servants. When the Lord's great and terrible judgment was placed upon the Jews, as recorded in Matthew 24 and fulfilled in the destruction of the temple and near-genocide of the Jews in the city. God spared the faithful by warning them of this disaster. The Savior gave signs which would warn them of the impending catastrophe and thus would give them time to escape the city and to avoid the horrors of that event.

Confidence In The Lord

Many times when people talk about faith, they strip it of some of its essential elements. Often, it is limited to a mere belief in something: that is, one accepts a particular concept as true. Certainly, faith includes this fact, but it also encompasses vastly more. It involves trust, confidence, reliance, submission of will, total dependence, etc.

How and why can a person live without the horror of fear? How can a person lie down to pleasant dreams in the face of adversity and trials? Solomon's answer is simple and profound,

For the Lord shall be thy confidence and shall keep
thy foot from being taken (Prov. 3:26).

One's faith (confidence, trust, reliance) is in God who is able and willing to provide and care for His children.

When our son Taylor was very young, he would occasionally have frightening dreams. They were few

and far between, but he became afraid to go to sleep at night for fear of having one of these. Our solution to the problem was simple, but effective. We gave him a stuffed dog that we called “*Fleagle*” as his companion and we told him that knowing Fleagle was there would help to keep him from having bad dreams. Old Fleagle did the job, because Taylor’s confidence was in the stuffed animal. He has been in our house for twelve years now, and he has accepted a new role of providing comfort for our daughter Libby. He is much the worse for the wear of those years, but he holds a special place in our family’s hearts.

When we can see and believe in God’s great care for us, we will experience a wondrous calm and confidence about life in general. Our prayers take on new meaning, our labors are more directed and our reliance upon God becomes total. The end result is a life of boldness, direction, meaning and trust in God.

Conclusion

God can and does care for His people in ways that are often not even recognized. Many times we speak of “*luck*” and “*coincidence*” rather than recognizing that perhaps this is a case of God providing. Care must always be taken in styling something as being providential, because such may not necessarily be the case. The faithful Christian, however, realizes that “*every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights...*” (James 1:17).

Well did the Psalmist say in Psalm 34:15-17:

The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry. The face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth. The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles.

Endnotes

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Should Christians Expect Miracles When They Pray For Physical Illness?

Wendell Winkler

Introduction

The providence of God parades both testaments. Who would doubt the providential workings of God in the lives of Joseph (Gen. 45:5-7), Esther (Esther 4:14), Ruth or the apostle Paul (Rom. 1:9-10; 15:30-32; Acts 21:28–28:16). And, much about the workings of providence have no doubt, in the workings and decisions of God, been left in the realm of the secret things, the unrevealed things (Deut. 29:29). However, though such be the case, “*we believe and are sure*” (John 6:69) that prayer providentially effects the omnibenevolence of a loving Father (II Cor. 1:9-11). Otherwise, many of His precious promises (for example, I Cor. 10:13) and the exercise of prayer become meaningless. Accordingly, we begin our study of the assigned topic.

I. Concerning Prayer And Providence, We Know Christians Can Pray

(1) **Not all men are on praying terms with God.**
We read in John 9:31 where the healed man says,

Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth.

Proverbs 28:9 reads,

He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law,
even his prayer shall be abomination.

Did not Song of Solomon write,

...then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer;
they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me
(Prov. 1:28).

How tragic is such a state; to pray and not be heard. Remember how in desperation wicked King Saul went to the Witch of Endor; and, when Samuel appeared, Saul said,

I am sore distressed; for the Philistines make war
against me, and God is departed from me, and
answereth me no more, neither by prophets, nor by
dreams (I Sam. 28:15).

One of the horrors of hell is the unending experience of praying, calling and pleading for mercy and receiving no alleviating response (Luke 16:19-31)!

(2) However, Christians can, should, must and will pray.

And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because
we keep his commandments, and do those things
that are pleasing in his sight (I John 3:22).

Those who abide in him and allow His word to abide in them, have the assurance He hears (John 15:7). A little girl who was distraught over her sister's illness made her way up into the attic and placed a note between the rafters and shingles. Upon being asked by her mother why she so did, she responded,

I thought if I got as near God as I could, He would do
the rest.

Yes, Christians, those who live near the Lord, can

effectually pray (James 5:16).

II. Concerning Prayer And Providence, Christians Can Pray For Themselves And Others Also

(1) **Christians can pray for themselves.** Did not Hezekiah, who was a child of God, so do (II Kings 20:1-3). Did not Hannah, another child of God, do the same (I Sam. 1:10-15)? Then, James 1:5 encourages,

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

(2) **Christians can pray for others.** Jesus so did. He prayed for His disciples in John 17, He prayed for His murderers in Luke 23:34 and He prayed for Simon in Luke 22:32. Who can believe otherwise but that when Paul and the Ephesian elders knelt on that sandy beach that they prayed each for the other (Acts 20:36). Who can believe otherwise but that Paul prayed for Epaphroditus when he was sick unto death (Phil. 2:25-27)? Does not the text say that *“God had mercy on him; and not on him only,”* thus implying an answer to prayer? When Paul had to leave Trophimus in Miletum sick, who would think otherwise but that he was the constant burden of Paul’s prayers (II Tim. 4:20). Do we not have Paul’s recorded prayer for the Ephesians in Ephesians 3:14-21 and Paul’s request of the Ephesians to be remembered in their prayers (Eph. 6:18-20)? Paul prayed for the Philipians (Phil. 1:3-11). He also prayed for the Colossian brethren (Col. 1:9-17), while requesting to be remembered in their prayers (Col. 4:2-4). Paul also prayed for the Thessalonian Christians (II Thess. 1:11-12). While asking them

...pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be the saints; that I may come unto you with joy by the will of God, and may with you be refreshed (Rom. 15:30-32).

Indeed, they were to make a threefold request in the interest of Paul. Paul prayed for the father of Publius as he lay sick of a fever and a bloody flux (Acts 28:8). Though much of James 5:13-16 relates to the apostolic period when miracles were being performed, there are some principles and points to be gleaned therefrom:

Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms. Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up: and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.

Yes, *“pray one for another.”* One congregation of our acquaintance has a ministry in which the elderly folks are called regularly and given the names of those who are experiencing the reverses of life with such ones being added to their individual prayer lists. We also know of a gospel preacher in the far north who called a faithful elder in the south requesting him to pray for the extremely ill son of a fellow missionary. Here is another illustration of remembering others while they suffer the adversities of life.

IV. Concerning Prayer And Providence, We Can Expect An Answer

To affirm otherwise is to tend toward deism (that is, God, as it were, wound the earth up as a clock, stepped away and is waiting for it to wind down). Matthew 5:43-48 teaches the general providence of God in that

...he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

Romans 8:28 teaches the special providence of God in that

...all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

It is into the realm of the latter that answered prayer falls. With this brief background in mind, let us now observe:

(1) God promises to hear us when we pray.

James 5:16 states,

Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

Also, Hebrews 4:16 encourages us by affirming,

Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

I Peter 3:12 reads,

For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.

In the sermon on the Mount our Lord said,

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him? (Matt. 7:7-11).

And, beneath His promise to hear us when we pray are His immutable traits of omniscience, omnipotence, goodness and holiness. His omniscience will not let Him forget that He made the promise, His omnipotence will

enable Him to perform what He has promised, His goodness will not let Him disappoint us in failing to fulfill the promise, and His holiness will not let Him misrepresent the matter. Thus, we need to be far more concerned over the fact that we may not hear God rather than that God will not hear us. Brother Gus Nichols once challenged a man, who doubted whether or not God was hearing him when he prayed, to blaspheme God some dark midnight hour. The man said he would not think of doing such. Whereupon brother Nichols ask him why he would refuse to thus blaspheme. The man replied, *"I'm afraid God would hear me."* Brother Nichols in his inimitable way then replied, *"You think God will hear you when you blaspheme, but you doubt that he will hear you when you pray."*

(2) All great men of God have believed God answers prayers. Paul did. He told the Philippians,

For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:19).

David did. Numerous are the passages in the book of Psalm so affirming (Psm. 17:1,6; 27:7; 28:6; 34:4, 15-18; 40:1-3; 55:12, 16, 17, 22; 86:7). Let us read just one of these:

In the day of my trouble I will call upon thee: for thou wilt answer me (Psm. 86:7).

James D. Harding did. It is reported that the morticians were amazed at the callouses on his knees which they observed while preparing his body for burial. Yes, he had spent considerable time upon them! Was it all in vain? Brother C. E. McGaughey was discovered as having a malignancy. Whereupon he prayed to God and made a vow that *"if you will let me live I will preach more for you than ever before."* God heard and answered. He lived some additional fifteen years and did some of his best preaching while engaged in doing *"more than he ever*

had before."

(3) **Numerous are the examples of God answering when men prayed.** God heard Hannah and opened her womb (I Sam. 1:27). God heard Hezekiah and lengthened his life (II Kings 20:5; 19:14-20). Elijah prayed and it rained not; he prayed and it rained (James 5:16-18). Nehemiah prayed and Israel returned to the land (Neh. 1:4-6:15). The early church prayed and Peter was released from prison (Acts 12:5-19). Indeed, more things are wrought through prayer than the world dreams of.

(4) **In fact, we must believe that God will hear and answer us or our prayers become meaningless exercises in futility.** Mark 11:24 states,

Therefore I say unto you, what things so ever ye desire, when you pray, believe that you will receive them, and ye shall have them.

The footnote in the Revised version for the word "*receive*" is *received* (past tense). Thus, the Lord is teaching us that our faith in God answering our prayers is to be so strong that when we pray, we pray as if the desired blessing has already been received! "*We **lie** to God in prayer if we do not **rely** upon him after prayer.*" "*The doubtful petitioner does not offer God a steady hand in which to deposit his gift.*"

(5) **God answers our prayers in five ways.** (a) Sometimes He says, "*No,*" as in the case of His son praying in the garden (Matt. 26:39, 44; Heb. 5:7). (b) Sometimes He says, "*Wait awhile,*" as in the case of Jeremiah (Jer. 42:4, 7) and Nehemiah (Neh. 1:1-4 plus 2:1). (c) Sometimes God says, "*I will give you something all together different,*" as He did in the case of Paul praying for the removal of his thorn in the flesh (II Cor. 12:7-9). It is said that an anonymous soldier of the Confederacy penned the following words:

I asked God for strength.
that I might achieve—

I was made weak,
 that I might learn humbly to obey.
 I asked for health
 that I might do greater things–
 I was given infirmity,
 that I might do better things.
 I asked for riches,
 that I might be happy–
 I was given poverty,
 that I might be wise.
 I asked for all things,
 that I might enjoy life–
 I was given life,
 that I might enjoy all things.
 I got nothing that I asked for–
 But everything that I had hoped for.
 Despite myself, my prayers were answered.
 I am, among all men, most richly blessed!

(d) Sometimes God says, “*I will give you the very things for which you ask,*” as he did in the case of Elijah praying for rain (James 5:17). (e) Sometimes God says, “*I will give you more than you asked,*” as he did to King Solomon (I Kings 3:11-13; Eph. 3:20). Concerning some of the ways in which God answers our prayer, how accurately and strengtheningly did Jerry Gross state the matter. In the ***Southeastern Evangelist***, volume 8, number 5, he wrote,

If God answers prayer today He will do so providentially; that is, in keeping with the laws of nature. One must remember that God’s purpose is not to make this life a paradise, nor to make our pains and problems disappear as they arise. His purpose in providence is to bring us to Him, and this purpose may very well be accomplished through pain and suffering (Psm. 119:67, 71, 75; Jer. 31:18-19; Heb. 12:6-11). Hence, our every prayer should be attended with the spirit ‘if the Lord will’ (James 4:15; Rom. 8:27; I John 5:14).

(6) Under the circumstances of this assigned topic—physical illness, sorrow, grief, suffering, perplexity, lack of wisdom—what can we expect in

answer to our prayers? We can expect God to never forsake us (Heb. 13:5-6). We can expect God to tenderly care for us (I Peter 5:7). We can expect God to work all things together for our good (Rom. 8:28). We can expect the Lord to be our sword and our shield, giving grace and glory, and withholding no good thing from us as long as we walk uprightly (Psm. 84:11). We can expect Him to fulfill His promises and assurances as beautifully expressed in Romans 8:31-39:

What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed as the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come. Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Yes, we can even expect Him to do

exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us (Eph. 3:20-21).

Unquestionably he will supply all of our need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:19).

(7) Indeed, there is power in prayer. *"Nothing lies outside the reach of prayer except that which lies outside the will of God."* Prayer changes things! Accord-

ingly, let us be encouraged to pray; for, prayer is not conquering God's reluctance, but laying hold on his willingness!

**V. Concerning Prayer And Providence,
We Can Expect An Answer:
However, Such Will Not Be Miraculous**

As we begin, let us notice several observations: **First**, we have established the fact that God hears and answers prayer (see previous thoughts). **Secondly**, let us note some definitions. (a) *Miracles* suspend natural law. Miracles transcend the laws of nature. (b) *Providence* works within the framework of natural law, working behind the scene. **Thirdly**, let us see the only three apparent ways as to the "how" God answers prayer: miraculously, auto-suggestively, or providentially. **Fourthly**, if our third observation is accurate, and God does answer prayer, if we scripturally eliminate the first and second "how" God answers prayer, we will have shown that God answers prayer providentially; yea, prayer and providence become inseparable. Accordingly, let us proceed:

(1) **We begin by observing that God does not answer prayer miraculously.** We give four reasons for thusly affirming. **First**, spiritual gifts, such involving the miraculous, ceased when God's complete revelation came to be (I Cor. 12:8-10; 13:8-13). **Secondly**, the method of transferring miraculous powers (through the laying on of the apostles' hands) has ceased (Acts 8:14-21). **Thirdly**, the purpose of miracles has been served, said purpose being confirmatory (Mark 16:20; Heb. 2:1-4). **Fourthly**, the classification of miracles shows indisputably they have ceased. There was miraculous power over death (John 11), disease (Mark 2:1ff), demons (Mark 5:1-9), material things (John 6:5-14) and nature (Mark 4:35-41). If one classification is still active, why not all of the others? **Next**, let us note that prayer and the miraculous are sometimes associated together. Remem-

ber the church praying and the prison doors being opened in Acts 12:5ff? But, this does not necessitate a miracle for prayer to be answered. Who would doubt that God answers our prayer when we petition Him, “Give us this day our daily bread?” However, He does not answer in the miraculous way He did in giving manna to the Israelites. Rather, such is done providentially. **Furthermore**, we do not have to have the miraculous to have the providential. They are not one and the same thing. When the angel stood by the apostle Paul, on the occasion of his ship being wrecked, and said, “God hath given thee all them that sail with thee,” such was a miracle. But, the passengers safely getting to shore by swimming and floating on broken pieces of the ship was not miraculous. Peter’s deliverance from prison in Acts 12:5ff was miraculous, whereas there is no suggestion of the miraculous in Paul being delivered from so great a death (II Cor. 1:9-11). Much of what occurred on Mount Carmel in Elijah’s contest with the prophets of Baal was miraculous (I Kings 18:31-39). But, his prayer for rain was answered providentially and not miraculously (I Kings 18:41-46; James 5:18). Yes, there were clouds and they came from the right direction. This is providence. Had they been in a desert without a single cloud in the sky, and rain would have come, such would have been a miracle. **Lastly**, let us illustrate the present matters of discussion. Brother Hulen L. Jackson penned the following words in the *Firm Foundation*, February 24, 1976:

Think of all the miraculous aspects connected with the birth of Jesus. He was born of a virgin. A miracle. God spoke to the parents before his birth giving them instructions. A miracle. The star in the East. A miracle. The angels singing in the heavens to the shepherds in the field. A miracle. God’s instruction later for Mary and Joseph to take their new son to Egypt and his later instructions to return to Canaan. A miracle. And, there were other miraculous aspects.

But, note how God's divine providence brought it all about. Caesar Augustus issued a decree that all the world should be taxed. Joseph happened to be of the house of David and therefore went to Bethlehem to be enrolled. A miracle had stated that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). Providence arranged this member of the house of David to be in that certain city in order that Jesus might be born there as the prophet had foretold.

Separate the providence from the miracles and yet thank God for both. Had God spoken to Joseph to tell him to go to Bethlehem, that would have been another miracle. But, God didn't do that as far as we know. His providence led the thinking of Caesar in Rome to make a certain decision and at a definite time. God saw to it that Joseph knew about that Roman law and that Joseph did make the trip and that Mary, the expectant mother, went along on the trip. Clear providence is seen in working out through them all God's will. No miracle, however, in these movements.

(2) We next observe that there is more to it than auto-suggestion. Now, we would not deny the auto-suggestive power involved in praying. For example, praying to God for patience will automatically cause a person to work harder at the job than he would have so done otherwise. However, there is far more to answered prayer than auto-suggestion. Paul hoped to be freed from prison through the efficacy of the prayers of Philemon (Phile. 22). This is far more than auto-suggestion. Then, we once more make reference to the Corinthians prayer for Paul. II Corinthians 1:9-11 reads,

But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us; Ye also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons thanks may be given by many on our behalf.

However, something happened! God delivered them *“from so great a death.”* What brought about such? What contributed to such? The answer: *“Ye also helping together by prayer for us.”* This is far more than auto-suggestion.

(3) Consequently, we conclude that God does answer prayer providentially. (a) He did such in the case of Elijah. (b) He did so in the interest of Paul. (c) Additionally, we sincerely believe the author’s recovery from two major surgeries, and the case of C. E. McGaughey etc. to be providential. They were not miraculous. Recovery from the sick bed in our day and time is no where at all comparable to the instantaneous miraculous healings of our Lord’s day (Mark 2:8). Rather, behind the scenes, the law-giver was at work! (d) However, a warning and caution is altogether necessary and appropriate. To say that God does not work providentially is to deny the Scriptures. However, to *“prove”* such subjectively may be something else. Even in Esther’s case the text reads,

And who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this (Esther 4:14).

Then, in the case of Onesimus Paul wrote to Philemon,

For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever (Phile. 15).

Though we believe in providence without a microscopic doubt, we must be careful about seeking to prove matters subjectively.

VI. Concerning Prayer And Providence, We Can Expect An Answer; And, Such Is Inseparably Attached To The Fatherhood Of God

(1) Such is taught by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount.

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asked receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him? Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets (Matt. 7:7-12).

(2) Such is taught by James, the Lord's brother.

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him (James 1:5).

Conclusion

(1) **Review.** In this study concerning prayer and providence we have observed that (a) Christians can pray, (b) Christians can pray for themselves and others also, (c) Christians can pray for themselves and others when the adversities of life assail, (d) Christians can expect an answer to their prayers, (e) Christians should expect a providential answer rather than a miraculous answer to their prayers and, (f) God's providentially answering our prayers is inseparably attached to His fatherhood.

(2) **Belief in the providential answering of prayer is most comforting and strengthening.** To believe otherwise leaves the soul shaken and the heart empty. Contrariwise belief in the providential working of God, in conjunction with our prayers, brings comfort to broken hearts, assurance to troubled minds and strength to burdened backs. Belief therein allays fears, quells,

doubts and conquers anxieties. How wonderful to sing:

Be not dismayed whate'er betide,
Beneath His wings of love abide,
All you may need He will provide,
Nothing you ask will be denied,
No matter what may be the test,
Lean, weary one, upon His breast,
God will take care of you.

What Do The Lives Of Caleb And Joshua Teach About The Providence Of God?

Foy L. Smith

There is no greater theme in many ways than the theme that deals with the providence of God. It is a subject as wide as the Bible, as deep as the earth, and as high as heaven. If we thoroughly understood it we probably would not appreciate it. So many of the ways of providence are “past finding out.” Yet if we believe the word of God and trust in His great power we believe that providence is a great Bible truth. What is providence? Webster defines it thusly: “Divine guidance or care, exercising foresight, guiding through prevention.” Now if we believe anything we believe that God does guide us, that He does care for us, and that He can, without our understanding why or how, reach out and prevent the happening of certain things. Before we attempt to examine providence in the lives of two of the great Bible characters, Caleb and Joshua, let us elaborate somewhat upon some of the great Bible truths with which providence is associated.

Providence and Care

If God did not care for His own children there would be no need for His providence. But He does care. We do not understand the depth of that divine care, but He cares so much He arranged the world and everything in

it for man's happiness and well being. Peter told fellow Christians in his day to cast their cares upon Him, "*for he careth for you*" (I Pet. 5:7). In loneliness and discouragement David felt one time that God did not care; in fact, he felt that "*no man cared for my soul*" (Psm. 142:4). But David was wrong. Someone did care. God cared. And there were those about David that cared. Our Father shows His care by taking care of the birds (Matt. 6:26). "*They sow not, neither do they reap, yet your heavenly Father feedeth them.*" Then Jesus concludes that we are "*much better than they.*" He has His ways of caring for these little feathered creatures, and to me His care equates with His providence in taking care of them when they can't take care of themselves. The Hebrew writer says that the Father "*careth for oxen*" (I Cor. 9:9). And this has to be but an illustration of His providence in the lives of lowlier creatures. Will He not, therefore, care for us? The old lady in London may have presumed upon God's providence but I like what she said anyway, and I do not advocate presuming upon His providence. She said, upon refusing to move out of her top room with bombs bursting all around, "I say my prayers every night and then I go to sleep. There's no need for us both to stay awake." Sure, there's an element of foolishness in her statement, but without necessarily going that far I am sure we could all use a bit of her confidence. It is a certain fact that care cannot be separated from providence.

Providence and Faith

There are some things that we cannot explain, yet we believe in them. Providence is such a thing. Faith must be underneath everything we do. It is truly the foundation (Heb. 11:1). Without it "*it is impossible to please God*" (v. 6). This faith "*comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God*" (Rom. 10:17). But the word in just so many words does not tell us what providence is. It demonstrates it and illustrates it and from these we

have to get our definitions of what providence is. "But, explain it!" people continue to cry. I answer like this. See what you think of it: The apostle Paul says that God "*has ways past finding out*" (Rom. 11:33). If Paul could not fully explain God's providence, how can I? Or any other mortal creature? Paul admitted he could not explain it, but he certainly believed in it, for divine intervention had come to his aid time and time again. Providence does not nullify the word of God. It may in its own way open up opportunities, even prolong one's life, but it is still the gospel and gospel only that saves the lost sinner (Rom. 1:16).

Providence and Love

God cares for the birds and the beasts because He loves them. He made them and they are His. Should He be less attentive to creatures made after His image and given a rational status that no other creature possesses? Of course not. The heart of Jesus was often touched by the misfortunes of those who followed Him. For this reason it was said that "*He went about doing good*" (Acts 10:38) He once compared His providential love for His children to the care the mother hen has for her chicks (Matt. 22:37). This familiar illustration to those of us who were brought up in the day when the chickens had the run of the yard makes a lot of sense. In this unique manner Jesus was teaching on the oversight and providential care of His heavenly Father. If God did not love us so much He would not care what happens to us. But He cares – "*oh yes, He cares!*"

Providence and Prayer

Does a service ever pass by in which the help of God is not invoked upon those who are sick, in trouble, in deep sorrows brought on by the losses of loved ones? It would be a rare service indeed if these were not mentioned by way of petition to the Father. People go on vacations and ask for our prayers for their safety. And we

pray for them. Our loved ones are away in different branches of the service of our country. We never let a day go by without reminding the Father of our concern and our dependence upon him for their safety. In short, we ask Him to take care of them if it be His will. We must always pray according to His will and in His name (John 14:13, 14). “Well, just how does God go about protecting our loved ones and friends?” That I cannot answer. Perhaps it’s a part of his “*ways past finding out.*” Is prayer miraculous? No. We are dealing with a God who can harness all nature if He so commands for the benefit of his people. For lack of a better word, I call this providence. “Well, why does it seem to work for some and not for others, and maybe not even for us at all times?” I do not know. But I shall keep on believing and asking.

Providence and Acceptance

We can drive ourselves into complete despair if we try to solve the secret ways of God – if we try to answer all the unanswered, and even unanswerable questions. We must not forget that “*the secret things belong unto God*” (Deut. 29:29). There are so many times in life when we just have to accept things that we do not understand. “Why did this happen to me? to mine?” I do not know. It seems like this lesson is filled with “don’t knows.” Again, it seems that here is where faith and full confidence in God’s love and direction come in – come when we stand oftentimes in an alley that seems to have no way out. But there is a way and God will lead us through it. If His providence does not seem to work in some particular instance in our lives, then we must accept without bitterness whatever He wills in our lives. Faith will, and must, accept when reason rebels. Paul had to live with a “*thorn in the flesh,*” and we have our thorns. Sometimes they can be plucked out and at other times they remain and we have to make the best of them. Now with these things in mind, which I believe to be well worth our consideration when we study the matter of providence,

let us pay our attention for the rest of our lesson to God's providence in the lives of two of the Bible's greatest characters.

God's Providence in the Life of Caleb

The history of Caleb is set forth in the books of Numbers, Joshua, Judges, I Samuel, and a few mentions in I Chronicles. He was of the tribe of Judah (Num. 13:6). Spies from each of the tribes were to spy out the land, learn what kind of land it was, whether the people were weak or strong. Their maneuvers were very much like they would be today in modern warfare. They had to know the enemy. Even with the providence of the Almighty, Joshua and Caleb knew they would have to do everything in their power to successfully take the land. And after doing what they could with the Lord's help, the Lord would then step in and do what they could not do. They searched out the secrets of the land, went to the South, went by Hebron, checked on the fruits and things growing, and brought back grapes, pomegranates and figs (Num. 13:23). The spies were gone for forty days, found many good things, but had this to report upon their return:

The land floweth with milk and honey but the people are stronger than we...and we saw giants of the sons of Anak, and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers (vs. 27, 31, 33).

In Caleb's response to their fright and excuses, he said,

Let us go up at once and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it (v. 30).

In what was Caleb trusting? In his own strength? No! In the strength of a frightened people? No! He was trusting in the strength of Jehovah God, who stood by them to fight for them. Call this what you may. I call it the providence of the Lord. God told them to do it, and He

was a God who cared, who loved, and who promised them success. Their complete trust in Him, after being encouraged by their leaders, clearly demonstrated the providence of the Almighty. Were all the people convinced? Oh no! Not by a long shot! The people cried that night and murmured against Moses and Aaron (Num. 14:1, 2). God had said that He would give them the land of Canaan but they would have to *“search it out.”* God will not, and has never gone the entire way for man. He made him so he could act – obey or disobey. This is the free agency of man, one of God’s greatest gifts to him. Otherwise man would have been no more than a robot. The spies carrying the cluster of grapes on a staff between two men show the care they took to not bruise them. They wanted Moses and others to see the beauty of the land as evidenced in the beautiful, uncrushed grapes. Yet the people were not willing, even with the Lord’s help, to go forward and take the land. How much like those faithless people we are today! *“I will never leave thee nor forsake thee”* doesn’t mean too much to the average ones among us now. We are journeying toward the eternal Promised Land, Heaven, with assurance that God will see us all the way through on our journey. Yet we halt so often in unbelief like other ancients (I Kings 18:21). And our halting is evidence that we do not fully believe that God is able to bring us through to a successful conclusion. Our faith in His providence just isn’t there.

Adam Clark in his great commentaries suggests that throughout the ages of history there have been, from time to time, men of very great stature. He mentions two brothers he knew personally who were “upward of seven feet.” And one in the same neighborhood who was eight feet, six inches. Now that last one was a tall one! The seven-footers, according to today’s basketball players, weren’t so tall. Plenty of today’s athletes, especially in the sport mentioned are in the neighborhood of seven feet and some two or three inches over that height. It is

believed by authorities that Goliath was over nine feet tall. So there were giants around in those days and the spies returned from the land saying that they were afraid to go up on account of them. The people were afraid to go. And the spies discouraged their going by saying "*The land is good, but...*" This sounds like some of us in this present day, far removed from the land of Canaan. "Oh, we admit it is a good work, but ..." And if we can't "but" others to death, we'll "but" ourselves to death. How often our Lord must sadly say, "*Oh, ye of little faith*" as He did to His disciples just about in the middle of where we now live and where the people of Caleb's day lived back then (Matt. 6:30). The difference between Caleb and the people in that day was a difference of believing in a God who would give them victory – believing in a God who cared, who loved them, and in not believing in Him. I say it was a matter of believing in His divine guidance, His providence and not believing in it.

In chapter 14 the people cried and murmured against God and Moses and Aaron. I am sure that all preachers have had someone murmur in every place they have ever been. I have, though I was fortunate through the years I worked locally. But have the entire congregation murmur? No man could long stand up under that, yet that's exactly what God's leaders had back in those days in their long trek toward the promised land. The people even said, "*Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt*" (14:2). Then they wanted to return to Egypt. So soon it seems they had forgotten that everything wasn't just right under Pharaoh. They even wanted a "new" captain. Sounds like some churches that want to change preachers every time the work doesn't go exactly right according to them. The people were told again that the land was a good land and, "*if the Lord delight in us He will bring us into this land.*" And so He did – providence, protection and care all the way. God threatened to utterly destroy the people, and they did deserve it, but Moses interceded, saying that if God did

not give the people at least their posterity, the land, the heathen nations round about would laugh and say that God had begun something that even He could not finish (14:16). But Caleb had

....another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whereinto he went; and His seed shall possess it (14:24).

Where Caleb could not see he walked by faith, trusting in God all the way. Call this what you will; I call it providence. In the first chapter of Deuteronomy, Moses rehearses what befell Israel on their way to Canaan. As thousands of the people traveled they were to hear the voices of the judges, who were to judge without respect of persons. God knew well that troubles and strifes would come as they journeyed through *“that great and terrible wilderness”* (v. 19). The Lord was giving them the land, yet they had to *“go up and possess it.”* Man has never been completely passive in his salvation. He has always had to do works, and in the New Testament they are called *“righteous works”* (Acts 10:34, 35). Moses reminds them how God had said they should not be afraid of the giants they encountered along the way. The Lord would fight for them. But their troubles came when they *“did not believe the Lord”* (v. 32). Here Caleb’s name is mentioned again, because *“he wholly followed the Lord.”* Caleb’s children, Joshua, and the “younger generation” would be allowed to go into the land. Much history passes by and the people struggle to get into the land that God promised them. It becomes the responsibility of Joshua to make certain divisions. Caleb makes what may seem like a strange request. He asked for the place God had spoken of, the land of the Anakims along with their fenced and walled cities:

If so be the Lord will be with me, then I shall be able to drive them out (Josh. 14:12).

Then Joshua blessed him and gave him Hebron for an

inheritance. Caleb had said,

Now therefore give me this mountain whereof
the Lord spake in that day.

He received Hebron according to his request. He had been a living demonstration of the providence of God and his unshakable faith in it that God would follow through to the fulfillment of all His promises. Forty-five years have passed since they started out, many things have happened. Most of the old ones have died, Caleb has had wives and children, and his life is beginning to end in the recordings of I Chronicles, chapter one. The greatest epitaph that can be written over his name is, HE BELIEVED IN GOD. HE TRUSTED HIM WITHOUT WAVERING. HE NEVER DOUBTED THE DIVINE GUIDANCE OF HIS FATHER – HIS DIVINE PROVIDENCE. And now we come to ...

God's Providence in the Life of Joshua

The lives and works of Caleb and Joshua run parallel throughout these journeyings toward the promised land. They possibly could be discussed together, but my assignment for this chapter specifically stated that they should be discussed separately. So I am proceeding to do my best to follow the instructions. Naturally, there will be a bit of lapping over here and there. Joshua was the son of Nun, of the tribe of Ephraim (I Chron. 7:27). He was on the scene of action from about 1530 to 1420 B.C. He was one of the twelve sent out to explore the land and one of two who came back with a good report. We have already learned who the other one was. Shortly before his death Moses gave him authority over the people (Num. 29:18). Moses had been with him enough to know that he trusted God and would do only what God commanded. He would follow divine orders without questions. This shows how strongly Joshua believed in the providence of God. "If Jehovah God says do it, I will do it." A man remarked, "It will be

a good day tomorrow if it does not rain.” Another replied, “It will be a good day whether it rains or not.” Why can’t we all have this submissive attitude when it comes to the Lord’s doings? The name “Joshua” means “Savior,” or, “whose help is Jehovah.” In Exodus 24:13 he is called “*Moses’s minister,*” and in Exodus 33:11 he is referred to as “*Moses’s friend.*” It seems that Joshua was always close by Moses and ready to serve when the need arose. He went with Moses to the Mount when Moses received the commandments, and when Moses came down Joshua told him, “*there is a noise of war in the camp*” (Exod. 32:17). Involved in the confusion while Moses was gone was the making of a golden calf for the people to worship. Moses saw it, was filled with anger, cast the “*tables of testimony*” down and broke them. They had to be rewritten, and God threatened to destroy the people. Moses pled for them and the Lord changed His mind. Things came to a head when Moses demanded that the people take a stand for or against the Lord: “*Who is on the Lord’s side? let him come unto me*” (32:26). A line was drawn between truth and idolatrous worship. A line must be drawn between what is right and what is wrong today. Truth cannot be compromised with error, for when this happens truth always loses. In all these ups and downs, Joshua stood faithfully by the side of Moses. He truly was his “minister,” his “friend.”

And the Lord spake to Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend...and his servant Joshua, a young man, departed not out of the tabernacle (Exod. 33:11).

How is it that when we seem so alone, feeling like the whole world around us has forsaken us, that a friend seems to always show up? No, it is not a miracle. But what about divine providence? It just might be that! Truly providence was busy in the lives of Moses and Joshua as it was in the life of Caleb.

So many times God stepped in just when Joshua

needed his divine help and assurance. It sounds like Paul who commented like this a few thousand years later:

And we know that all things work together for good, to them that love God, to them that are called according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28).

Joshua was called along with Moses and Caleb for a purpose. He obeyed, and God's protective power followed him – overshadowed him – God's providence. We do not know how God works things out for us, but we know He can and will if such things are according to His will. Regardless of how needed and capable a man may be, he finally comes to the end of the way – he finishes his work. This has always been true of great men, and it was very true of Moses, possibly the greatest leader the ancient people had. Moses died, but the work did not stop. God said to Joshua,

Go over into Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel (Josh. 1:2).

God told Joshua to *“be strong and of good courage,”* and that *“no man can stand before thee.”* With activity like this Jehovah God had to be with him in a special way – call it providence. I had a dear friend in Oklahoma. Our friendship started when I baptized him, his wife, and through the years that followed numbers of his family. He went off to war – the second World War and then the Korean conflict. He was not a bragging type. He would occasionally open up and tell me some of the horrors of those conflicts. In Germany he had a jeep literally cut in half. He and his men were spared when this awful barrage of firepower struck them. In Korea he and his men fought from behind a wall of human, enemies' bodies, sometimes six feet high. He came through. He was able to get back into faithful service, became one of my best friends and one of the best elders I ever knew.

More than once I saw him stand firm when liberalism threatened the church where he served so many years. A miracle? No. Providence? He would have said yes. And I am prone to say yes. Understand it? No. Believe it? Yes. How many times in the life of Joshua did he stand with his men under most fearful conditions? Only God knows. How many fell all around him? Again, only God knows. But Joshua came through. It was God's will – his divine guidance.

For the Lord God is with thee whithersoever thou goest (Josh. 1:9).

Joshua was told that his loved ones would stay on *"this side of the Jordan"* while he with his men went to possess the land which had been promised them. He didn't stay behind at a safe distance; no, he went "right up to the front" with his men. God truly was with him!

In Joshua 2, we have the interesting story of Joshua sending the two spies to view Jericho, to learn the enemy strength. They lodged with a harlot named Rahab. Word gets to the king that they are there and he orders Rahab to bring them forth. Were they "providentially spared?" It does seem so. Rahab said to those searching for the men, *"Whither the men went out I wot not, pursue after them quickly..."* After the king's men were gone she made a covenant with Joshua's men, that she and her household might be spared when the invasion came about. Why did Rahab do all these things? *"For I know the Lord hath given you the land..."* (2:9). She seems to believe in Jehovah God strongly enough that she is listed with the "faithful" many centuries later in Hebrews 11:31. As the result of this remarkable true story we learn of the scarlet thread and what it signified:

When we come into the land, thou shalt bind this line of scarlet thread in the window which thou didst let us down by... (2:18-21).

She was promised that she and her family would be

spared, but only if they complied with the conditions stipulated. She accepted these conditions by saying, “*So be it.*” Thus when she obeyed strictly the commands of Joshua she and her household were spared. Strange way to spare and save a household? Yes, but many times in those days God did move in strange ways. After the report of the spies Israel gets ready to move at the sign of the Lord. The priests and Levites bear the holy ark of the covenant and the people follow at some distance behind it. In fact they were to follow about three thousand cubits behind it. When you think that a cubit was about eighteen inches it becomes a sobering thought that the people were not allowed to get any closer to it. Do you wonder why this was so? The ark was their pilot and was a pledge of the Divine presence. Had the people crowded upon it as they were prone to do, the ark would not have been conspicuous at all times. It seems now that the priests alone are bearing the ark. Early commentators say it was probably uncovered so everyone could see it, not covered with its curtains as it always was when the Levites carried it. After all, it was the high priest who went into the Holy of Holies once per year and offered sacrifices for himself and the people (Heb. 9:7). Twelve stones are put up in the Jordan where the priest’s feet rested, “*and they are there unto this day*” (4:9). About forty thousand passed over and they feared Joshua as they had feared Moses. The people were instructed to teach their children later on the significance of the twelve stones. They were a memorial to remind them of this great crossing, how God providentially guided them all the way. The waters of the Jordan were parted, the people passed through; then after the priests that bore the ark passed through, the waters came back together. By then the men who had been circumcised prior to the start of the journey had died. They had been journeying forty years. Now before they go farther the ones that were born along the way had to be circumcised (4:4-8). The place was called Gilgal. Here they kept the passover

on the fourteenth day, at even in the plains of Jericho. From this day on they ate of the land of Canaan and the “heavenly” bread (manna) was eaten no more (5:12). We talk about the providence of God – what about the wondrous manner in which manna came down from heaven to sustain the children? And be sure Joshua had his portion from day to day. So did Moses and Caleb (Exod. 16:35). For forty years they ate this bread. And a bit was preserved in the Mercy Seat in the Holy of Holies as a memorial of their long journey.

The manner in which Jericho was given to Joshua shows the divine care of the Father. No other military man in the annals of all time ever had a charge like the one given to the children. God said, “*I have given you Jericho*” (6:2). But there were acts that had to be performed. They were to march around the city one time each day for six days, and on the seventh day march around it seven times. The priests were still carrying the ark. After the marching on the seventh day the priests were to give forth a blast on the ram’s horn, and then upon the sound of the trumpets all the people were to shout, but not until Joshua gave the command. The city was accursed and only Rahab the harlot was to live. On the given signal all the people shouted and the wall fell down flat and God’s army rushed in and destroyed everything save the harlot and her family. In the chapters that follow to the end of the story as far as Joshua was concerned, we read of the conquering of Ai (chap. 7) but not before Israel suffered a defeat. The children wondered why and were told by Jehovah that “*Israel hath sinned.*” The command to not take any spoils had been violated and Achan was found guilty of taking a Babylonish garment and some gold and silver. He and all his household were put to death because they had dishonored God and the army of Joshua. What a stern lesson for us today – for those who think they can play fast and loose with anything God says and get by with it! The Lord’s people continue to take the land, defeating the

Hittites, Amorites, the Canaanites, Perizzites, and the Jebusites. These nations tried to deceive Joshua saying, *"We be come from a far country"* (9:6). When their deception was found out some were destroyed, and it seems that some were spared because of their frank confessions and promises of restitution. Gibeon was an example of a great city that made peace with Joshua. Five strong kings united but they could not stand before the Israelites. They warred a long time but Joshua took all the lands that God had promised the people. The rest of the history of Joshua deals with final conquests of all the promised land, the divisions of the land and Joshua's total obedience to Jehovah until his time to die came. Yet he was strong until the last (14:11). Caleb was given Hebron when Joshua was eighty-five years old. He had asked for this particular part of the possessed land, *"Now give me this mountain."* He had conquered with Moses under the providence of God and now he wants Hebron. Just so, in other ways we as Christians have mountains to conquer and God will help us conquer them. Time forbids a discussion of the rest of the book but it goes on as we have learned up to now – conquering, conquering and settling after the long, long trek from Egypt. Joshua calls the people together and gives them his farewell speech (chap. 23). He recapitulates with warnings and promises. He tells them that all God did to the evil nations he did for his people, that they were to continue to be *"very courageous, to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses...to cleave unto the Lord,"* and that with the Lord *"one man can chase a thousand"*; he warns that they must continue to be on guard and not take their conquests for granted lest they lose all. He assured them that the great God would be with them, and His providence would be with them like it had been with the people since the day they left Egypt. The twenty-fourth chapter is a masterpiece and should be a grand finish to Joshua's leadership of the people. Now the sad time comes as "all good

things must end.” And despite their battles and struggles they had enjoyed many good things. They had truly seen the marvelous PROVIDENCE of God – had seen “*his ways that are past finding out*” by human investigations.

Joshua was one hundred, ten years old when he died.

And they buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnathserah which is in mount Ephraim on the north side of the hill of Gaash (24:29, 30).

A Few Closing Thoughts on Providence

I confess that I have had easier assignments, but possibly none that I have personally enjoyed studying more. Yet I, like others, have had to work largely in the realm of “uncertainty.” Certain of God’s providence, but uncertain many times as to *how* it works. How does God answer our prayers – for the sick, for ourselves, for our loved ones? We do not know everything about prayer. “Lord, our loved ones are making a long journey by land, by sea, or by air. Please protect them and bring them back to us if it be Thy will.” We pray like this every time we assemble, and we pray this way when we are alone. How does God do it? We don’t have all the answers. We know he can harness all nature to answer prayers if it be His will. So we keep on praying. “Why does he answer some prayers for others and not for us?” Well, maybe He does answer ours by saying “not now”. His providence may work for some in one way, for others in other ways. God’s providence does not contradict His word – never! What we sometimes call providence may not be providence at all. Many things can be attributed to divine providence when it is not so. A woman said to us, “Our son was coming down the mountain from Big Bear last night in his Volkswagen Bug. He lost control and it rolled several times. It was a total wreck. Our son walked away without a scratch! It was just the providence of the Lord!” How did she know? There were parents standing there right then who lost a son in a car accident. Do you know

what they were thinking? Of course you do. We all say, good for her, good for her son! But was it providence? Who knows? Remember providence is not to be equated with miracles. Miracles fall in another completely different category, and for specific purposes in the apostolic days.

Do we believe in Divine Providence? Of course. The God of the sparrows, and who takes care of them, cares for us and takes care of us in His own way. We must remember that “His ways” are not always “our ways.” Things work together for good if we love the Lord, and are called according to his purpose (Rom. 8:28). How? That’s God’s business. Providence does not set aside positive divine law. The alien sinner must hear, believe and obey the gospel (John 6:44, 45; Rom. 10:17; Heb. 5:8, 9; Acts 2:38; etc.). The believer must pursue steadfastly – must be unmovable and unshaken in the truth (I Cor. 15:58, 59).

Why do we often think that providence takes hold only when something goes wrong? In the old days a man rushed into a general store and exclaimed, “You know that narrow road up yonder on the side of the mountain? I was on that narrow curve and my horse was frightened. He dashed off the road and almost went over the cliff. The wagon was broken up, but we were not hurt. It was just God’s providence!” An old doctor listened and said, “You know I go up that mountain and around that sharp curve all hours of the day and night, summer and winter. I have never had my horse get scared, break up the wagon against that big boulder you mentioned, and I have been doing this for many years.” From this we glean a valuable lesson: God’s providence can work, when it works, under all conditions – certainly under good conditions. Maybe His providence had protected the old doctor from harm all those years.

Once, when Martin Luther felt despondent, he heard a bird singing an evening song. When the little feathered creature had finished, it tucked its head under

its wing to go to sleep. Luther reflected:

This tiny bird has had its supper and is now ready to go to sleep. It does not worry about tomorrow — where it will go, what it will do, or what it will eat. Or where it will spend tomorrow night.

Then he added,

Like David, it abides under the shadow of the Almighty. It just sits there and lets God care.

With some explanations and proper applications, maybe this is a good definition of Divine Providence. Maybe it was this kind of trust and faith that guided Caleb and Joshua throughout those long years that were not easy. They never quit trusting and God never quit directing.

Chapter 29

Can The Providence Of God Involve Material And Temporal Good?

David P. Brown

Before getting into the assigned study I would like to express my appreciation to brethren Garland Elkins, Thomas B. Warren and the elders of the Southaven Church of Christ for the **“Power”** journal and lectureship as well as the kindness extended to me by the invitation to participate in the first **“Power”** lectureship. I deeply appreciate the good work that both of these men and this church have done and are continuing to do for the Lord.

To understand the answer to the question that serves as the title of this article there must be a proper understanding of the passages by which the answer to said question is to be examined. First of all let us briefly consider Matthew 6:24-34:

Worldly minded people have their minds set on the things which have relevance only to earthly life. But godly people, who have understanding of what should have priority, have faith that God both knows what each one of us needs and will provide those needs (within bounds of His sovereign will).¹

Our trust in God to perform what He promised is imperative if we are to conduct our lives properly in this present world. A part of His promise in the passage

under consideration is that He will provide for His people not only spiritual blessings but physical blessings. It must be emphasized, however, that the material blessings that God has promised to supply His children are limited or controlled by His will, purpose or design for man. Thus, our Lord's promise to supply man's physical necessities is by no means to be taken as a promise to make multi-millionaires out of every person who becomes a child of God. God knows our needs and he knows how and when to dispense them to us. Our responsibility is to trust Him to perform what He has plainly said He would do for us regarding not only our spiritual necessities, but our physical needs as well. Our first and chief concern, according to Matthew 6:33, is to put spiritual things first in our plans and activities if we would enjoy God's material blessings.

Now let us get the basic message of the inspired apostle Paul in Romans 8:28.

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose.

The context or the environment of the passage has to do with the things that God has ordained to help the Christian get to heaven. Paul points out that (1) suffering (verses 14, 17), (2) hope (verses 24, 25), and (3) the Holy Spirit (verses 26, 27) help us to get to glory. With no uncertainty Paul then declares in verse 28 that through God's great power and providence ALL THINGS help us to walk the "*strait and narrow*" way to glory.

It should be realized that because a thing is good does not necessarily mean that it is pleasant. Some things are pleasant and not good. Some things are both good and pleasant at the same time. Paul is not saying that all things work together to make things pleasant for the child of God. Just because I cannot perceive the good in a given situation does not mean that no good is there. In God's good providence He will bring all things

together for good.² Elsewhere in this book the aforementioned providence is noted in detail in the life of Joseph (Gen. 37-50).

It must be understood that the omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, omni-just, and omni-benevolent God would do nothing to hinder man as a free moral agent in getting to heaven. This material world is *“perfect for what God made it to be”*; and he made it as a place to prepare for heaven.

Hence, in ordaining the scheme of redemption for lost mankind in eternity, before the world existed, God purposed, planned and then fashioned a material world that would be the perfect place or environment for *“soul-making”* (character building). God, therefore, not only ordained the system of faith whereby man could be saved, but he also ordained the proper place where such a faith system could be carried out or worked by man (Rom. 8:29, 30; Eph. 3:10, 11; II Tim. 1:8-10). The conclusion on man’s part is seen in Paul’s comment in Romans 8:31: *“What shall we then say to these things: If God be for us, who can be against us?”*

In dealing with the question serving as the title of this article in the light of the foregoing comments, I would conclude that God has guaranteed material and temporal good PLUS moral and spiritual good ACCORDING TO HIS WILL. Again I emphasize that good does not always mean that a thing is pleasant; and, that such good is always extended to man in accordance with God’s purpose as it is revealed in His will.

While there are many examples in the Bible of the aforementioned principle relative to providence, a brief summary of the events recorded in the book of Exodus clearly demonstrates God’s providential care. Please note the following list of events from the book of Exodus having to do with such care.

1. Though Pharaoh decreed the death of all male babies born to Hebrew mothers, God preserved Moses.
2. Moses learned from his hired nurse, who was his

own mother, the truth of God.

3. Because he was the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter, Moses received the best secular education available for his day (Acts 7:22).

4. As a shepherd in Midian for forty years he learned leadership, and also learned well the area through which he would later lead the Israelites.

As to God's providential control over civil governments, Daniel declared to Nebuchadnezzar concerning his vision:

This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men (Dan. 4:17).

At this point it is important to emphasize that by the power of God's word all things came into existence, and that all things continue by the power of His sustaining word (Gen. 1:3).

For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast (Psm. 33:9).

The inspired writer to the Hebrews declared that Christ is "*...upholding all things by the word of his power...*" (Heb. 1:3).

With the aforementioned matters in mind let us look at God's providential care in the book of Job.

1. Job declared that God could do all things and his purposes could not be hindered (Job 42:2).

2. In Job's trials we come to understand that the suffering of Job was a part of God's process of working things for good, but such was not a pleasant process. Hence, all suffering is not bad nor the result of evil.

3. God can and does overrule the devil and use him for the accomplishing of God's will (Job 10).

4. The only power that Satan has is what God allows

him to have (Job 1:12, 6).

5. The book of Revelation as well as that of Job declares that regardless of how things appear, God and His way will be victorious at the end of this present age.

It is obvious, then, that God provides for the needs (as defined in this study) of His saints. David acknowledged that,

I have been young and now am old: yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging according to his riches..." (Psm. 37:25).

Paul declared,

My God shall supply every need of yours according to his riches... (Phil. 4:19).

In God's good providence He protects His children. Paul wrote:

Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:37-39).

I have labored to point out that God does provide material and temporal good along with moral and spiritual good as such relates to God's eternal purpose for his saints. In saying the aforementioned, therefore, it must be understood that the ultimate end to God's providence is the eternal salvation of man in heaven. Therefore, God is not primarily concerned with rescuing man's temporal prosperity or his material happiness. God's giving or withholding of physical blessings relates directly to God's will and his omniscient insights into the spiritual needs of every faithful servant of God.

Indeed God's spiritual providence may take away wealth and bring poverty in its stead (as with Job or

Paul) in order to impart “*true riches*”. It may be made manifest in sickness, no less than in health, and may result in death instead of life.³

As a word of caution every Christian must realize that God’s providence is His business. It is erroneous, ridiculous as well fruitless to try to read every event in ones life as a sign from God. He who knows all that is an object of knowledge and who will not operate contrary to His revealed will is the only one to see all things in the composite, and therefore, how all things come together for the good of the faithful child of God. The Christian’s business is to know the will of God and to conduct himself accordingly. God will work his providential care for his children.

Because the Bible reveals to me that God has always abundantly provided for and protected his children, I know that while I “...*walk in the light as he is in the light...*” (I John 1:7), he will take care of me and all others who do the same. Such a disposition of mind and life motivates me to keep myself from sin; assuring me that God has not forsaken me though I suffer as Job suffered. My trust in God is strengthened because I know this life is designed to test my faith, trust, and confidence in God. My hope is vitalized because I can look beyond the classroom of life and the tests of faith thereof, to the day when I receive the “*crown of life*” (Rom. 8:24; Rev. 2:10). “*It imparts a patience that outlasts adversities, a fortitude that yields to no disaster, and a confidence that emerges unscathed from all furnaces of trial.*”⁴

The conclusion of the I.S.B.E. on this subject is an appropriate ending for this study of God’s providence.

We conclude then, that there is according to the Scriptures, an ever-watchful providence exercised by the heavenly Father over His faithful and loving children, which is ceaselessly working to secure their ever-increasing holiness and usefulness here, and their perfect happiness in a future state of existence. To prepare rational and immortal free

agents through holiness and usefulness here for happiness hereafter is the aim and end of this all embracing providence of God, which includes within its loving care every human being except such as exclude themselves therefrom by their own willful and persistent sinning. ...There is no providential highway to a state here that is free from life's ills, and that abounds in temporal and earthly blessings to the good.⁵

Endnotes

1 Garland Elkins and Thomas B. Warren, **The Book Of Matthew** (Sain Publications: Pulaski, TN 1988), p. 247.

2 Roy C. Deaver, **Commentary on Romans** (Unpublished manuscript), p. 423.

3 W. F. Tillet, **Providence, Prayer and Power** (Nashville, TN: Cokebury Press, 1962), p. 109.

4 John McClintock and James Strong, **Cyclopedia Of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature** Vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, Reprint, 1970), p. 711.

5 James Orr, ed., **The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia**, Vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956), p. 2485.

Chapter 30

How Is It That Good Men (Who Pray) May Suffer Materially While Evil Men (Who Do Not Pray) May Prosper Materially?

Kenneth L. Jones

Surely God is good to Israel, Even to such as are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet were almost gone; My steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious at the arrogant, When I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no pangs in their death; But their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; Neither are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride is as a chain about their neck; Violence covereth them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness: They have more than heart could wish. They scoff, and in wickedness utter oppression: They speak loftily. They have set their mouth in the heavens, And their tongue walketh through the earth. Therefore his people return hither: And waters of a full cup are drained by them. And they say, How doth God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High? Behold, these are the wicked; And, being alway at ease, they increase in riches. Surely in vain have I cleansed my heart, And washed my hands in innocency; For all the day long have I been plagued, And chastened every morning. If I had said, I will speak thus: Behold, I had dealt treacherously with the generation of thy children. When I thought how I might know this, it was too painful for me; Until I went into the sanctuary of God,

And considered their latter end (Psm. 73:1-17).

Why men suffer, and often the innocent more than the guilty, has been a perplexing problem from the earliest of times. Atheists have seized upon the instance of suffering and evil in an attempt to prove their contention that there is no God. They assert that a good, just and omnipotent God would not allow the innocent to suffer. The Psalmist struggled under the weight of this question until he “...went into the sanctuary of God...” He was envious of the prosperity of the wicked and their seemingly trouble-free lives, and even questioned the profitableness of serving God. But when he saw things in the light of eternal values and consummations, he understood that God truly is good, provident and just. The Christian will come to this same conclusion when he looks beyond the temporary and temporal to the eternal and spiritual. The burden of this lesson is to demonstrate that the occasions of suffering and poverty in the world, and often on the part of the righteous more than the wicked, does not disprove the goodness and providence of God.

God Is Provident

Providence is: “*a looking to, or preparation for, the future; provision.*” The fact of God’s providence is plainly and unequivocally taught in the Scriptures. There are affirmations to this effect, His provision may be seen in the lives of such persons as Joseph, Job, Caleb, Joshua, Esther and others, and there are also the “...*exceeding great and precious promises....*” (II Peter 1:4), one of which is that He will be with and watch over the righteous. In a general sense, He provides material blessings for all men alike, both good and evil. He sends the sunshine and rain on the good and the evil, the just and the unjust (Matt. 5:45). He has made provision for the eternal salvation of all who will believe and obey by making a plan and by sending His Son to bring it into

effect through the sacrifice of Himself upon the cross. In a special, or particular, way He makes provision for His own who faithfully serve Him. In times past, God has on occasions provided through the use of miracles; on other occasions in the past and in all instances today, He works through natural laws to accomplish His work.

Misunderstandings Concerning God's Providence

The fact of God's providence is easily established; the interpretation thereof is a different matter, entirely. To dogmatically affirm that a particular incident in one's life is an example of the special providence of God is an assumption which cannot be verified. One may believe that it is, but that is as far as he can and should go.

It is a misconception to interpret good fortune as an evidence that one's life is acceptable to God; it is equally wrong to assume that misfortune proves his disfavor. Good things happen to the wicked and ill fortune is often the lot of the righteous. If this criterion were true, the rich man (Luke 16) would have been carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom and Lazarus would have lifted up his eyes in the torments of hades. The early colonists of New England, the majority of whom were devout Calvinists, believed that only good things happened to the elect and that the evil things were reserved for the non-elect. They delighted in their good fortune as positive proof that they were of God's chosen. But when they began to experience ill fortune, which was inevitable, they could not cope. They lost their faith and swung from the extreme of Calvinism to that of agnosticism. This is the history of some of the most prestigious institutions of learning in New England today.

It is a misunderstanding of God's providence to think that it in any way interferes with the free-moral agency of men, or that men can interfere with God's absolute and eternal purposes. There is a difference between God's absolute will and unconditional prom-

ises, and those which are contingent. God promised Abraham that through his seed all nations of the earth would be blessed. He set in motion His provision for the fulfillment of the promise, but on one occasion He became so provoked with Israel that He told Moses that He would destroy them and *"make of thee a great nation"* (Exod. 32:10). This proves that God could have accomplished His plans in a different way than that which actually occurred. Moses interceded for the people and the seed line was fulfilled through Judah rather than through Moses (a Levite), but God said He would do it differently. If God said He would, He could. John confirmed the same as he preached to the Jews in Matthew 3:9,

and think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

This truth is also discerned from Mordecai's answer to Esther: if she held her peace, relief and deliverance would arise to the Jews from another place (Esther 4:14).

It is a mistake to conceive of all human suffering as punitive. This philosophy advocated by Job's friends was obviously false for the Bible declares that he was perfect and upright (Job 1:1). Jesus exposed the fallacy of this contention in the case of the man born blind to whom He gave sight (John 9:1-3). He said,

Neither did this man sin, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.

Such great children of God as Job, David, Paul and Timothy, all of whom suffered, and a host of Christians who have been persecuted and martyred for their faith in Christ exemplify the fact that all suffering does not result directly from sin.

Why Must All Men, Including The

Righteous, Suffer?

Men are rash and out of place who presume to know the causes behind every specific affliction which comes into the lives of individuals. The Scriptures reveal a number of reasons why some may suffer.

Some suffer as a direct consequence of their own sins (Gal. 6:7-9). Those who participate in permissive sexual activity may be afflicted with social diseases, perhaps fatally so. Drunkards through loss of coordination of body and alertness of mind may injure or kill themselves or others. Organic diseases often result from the use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. This list could be multiplied, but these are sufficient to show that the direct and inevitable consequences of some sins is human suffering.

There are those who suffer as a result of the sins of others. Many innocent victims have been slaughtered on the highways because of alcoholics who exercised their freedom of choice to drink and poor judgment to drive while under the influence of alcohol. Children and wives often suffer affliction and poverty because of indolent, alcoholic, or gambling husbands.

Some suffering results from the free moral agency of men. Righteous individuals have suffered because murderers, robbers and other law breakers used their freedom by inflicting pain and death on others.

Suffering sometimes results simply because of the laws of nature necessary to maintain an orderly universe. Those who violate the laws of nature, either intentionally or unintentionally, must suffer the consequences. If a person accidentally falls from a high cliff, God will not suspend the law of gravity, not even for the righteous.

The righteous suffer because, as Dr. Thomas B. Warren has explained, human suffering is an essential part of the ideal environment for soul making.² It is God's will that His people live for a short time in such an environment to prepare them to live with Him in heaven

forever (I Peter 1:6-9; Rom. 8:18). Chastening is not pleasant at the moment but later yields peaceable fruit to them exercised thereby (Heb. 12:6-11).

There are also those who are persecuted because they are righteous (I Peter 4:12-19). In fact, the Bible affirms,

Yea, and all that would live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution (II Tim. 3:12).

The Latter End

When Asaph (Psm. 73:17-28) went into the sanctuary of the Lord, away from the hustle and bustle of the world, and prayerfully reconsidered the question, he saw the situation more clearly. His first conclusion was incorrect because he had based it on incomplete information. His view was limited and perverted — he had not considered the latter end. The prosperity of the wicked is at best only temporary and very insecure. There will come a day of judgment when everything will surely be made right (II Cor. 5:10).

What is a few years of suffering and injustice in this world compared to an eternity of triumph and bliss, and what consolation could there be in earthly wealth and power which soon will end only to be followed by eternal ruin? One does not always know what is best for him, but God does. Some can handle wealth and power; others cannot, and if so prospered may even lose their souls. Many are poor in this life because they have willingly sacrificed earthly wealth and prestige to spend themselves in the cause of Christ.

When everything is weighed in the proper perspective, the righteous enjoy riches more precious and enduring — the spiritual blessings found only in Christ. They have hope to sustain them and assurance that God will be with them whatever obstacle or misfortune may come their way. They know that even...

...if the earthly house of our tabernacle be dis-

solved, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens (II Cor. 5:1).

When the complete story is known, what right thinking person would exchange the life of the righteous for that of the wicked?

Conclusion

God's providence does truly work in this world. That good men (who pray) may suffer in terrible ways while evil men (who do not pray—but are very rebellious toward God) are many times blessed (in regard to material wealth, popularity, power, etc.) in no way disproves this fact. The subject of providence and the problem of human suffering are often misunderstood. God is not dependent on the misconceptions and unreasonable expectations of men to establish His goodness and fidelity. When all things have been considered from an eternal and spiritual point of view, it is the righteous who are truly blessed and happy in life and eternity.

Endnotes

- 1 **Webster's New World Dictionary**, 1965 ed. (1964), s.v.
- 2 Thomas B. Warren, **Have The Atheists Proved There Is No God** (Jonesboro: National Christian Press, Inc., 1972), pp. 44-50.

What Does Deuteronomy 1-2 Teach About The Providence Of God?

Curtis A. Cates

This writer is delighted to be counted among the myriads of brethren who have commended the esteemed Thomas B. Warren, Garland Elkins and the Southaven elders and congregation for launching the **POWER** journal and lectureship. He predicts that the very first annual lectureship, with this volume, will catapult these efforts immediately to the level of the elite. God bless these loving and scholarly editors!

Introduction

No study of God's providence is complete without an examination of His ancient people, the Jews. That marvelous grace of God is seen in Deuteronomy, especially in chapters one and two. The theme of Deuteronomy might well be, "*The Love of God and Man's Response.*" Composed of speeches by the great leader Moses on the plains of Moab after the forty years of Israelite wanderings in the wilderness, the book addresses the second generation of Jews following the deliverance from Egyptian bondage.

Since the word providence is discussed in greater detail in other chapters, the reader is briefly reminded that God "provides" for His people. Indeed, He does so as the fleshly father provides what is best for his family,

only in an infinite, perfect way (Matt. 7:9-11).

But if any provideth not for his own, and specially his own household, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel (I Tim. 5:8).

God has provided for His creation (and especially for His own spiritual children) through natural providence, special providence, and miraculous providence. (Note: He no longer works through miracles, as He did before the cessation of the miraculous [I Cor. 13:8-13; Eph. 4:8-15; Acts 8:14-24; et al.]. He continues to work through natural and special providence [Matt. 6:11; 5:45; 16:25-34; James 5:16-18]). And, throughout all the ages, God has been governed, in His providing for man, by the law of parsimony (law of divine economy). Truly, God gave us the greater gift [our immortal spirits]; He will provide for the lesser gift which is necessary to house our spirits (our physical bodies). And, He is especially engaged in providing for the welfare of our souls—thus, He gave us the marvelous Book divine and provides all spiritual blessings in Christ (Rom. 1:16; Eph. 1:3; II Tim. 3:16, 17). (It shall not be the purpose of this chapter to delineate and categorize every means in which God provided for the Jews, as mentioned in Deuteronomy 1-2, relative to natural, or special, or miraculous providence.) It shall be the purpose of the author to investigate how this marvelous providence (1) demonstrates God's character, (2) shows God's love for and desire to help the Israelites, (3) reveals the severity of God (as well as High goodness), and (4) provides lessons for the Christian today.

Background

Providence is not boisterous, noisy, and rampageous. It is, on the other hand, so quiet as very often to be overlooked and unappreciated. Many things happened to the Israelites for which they were neither grateful nor glorified God. They were *very* forgetful

(Deut. 4:7, 23; 8:11-14; 19; 25:19).

Though it was only eleven days' journey from Horeb, where the law of Moses was given, to Kadesh-barnea, near the entering in to the promised land of Canaan, the journey of Israel had taken almost four decades (Deut. 1:2). Unbelief and rebellion had been a great curse to the first generation of Israelites; all had to die in the wilderness except Joshua, Caleb, and certain of the Levites (the priestly tribe who did not go to war). We are warned, lest we "*fall after the same example of disobedience*" (Heb. 4:1-11).

Moses gave a number of final exhortations, prior to his departure, as did others before their work ended (Gen. 49; Josh. 24; I Sam. 12; I Kings 2; John 13-17; etc.). Great significance is often placed on the last statements of the beloved departed; and, truly, great words of wisdom are often then delivered to those who remain! Very significant is the fact that Moses spake unto the children of Israel, according unto all that Jehovah had given him in commandment unto them" (1:3). He had been faithful in declaring all God's counsel all his days, carefully heeding the stern warning,

Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish from it, that ye may keep the commandments of Jehovah your God which I command you (Deut. 4:2).

Some preachers regretfully learn this lesson only later in life; others know it earlier in life and unfortunately cease preaching the whole truth; and, tragically, still others never learn that they must speak as the oracles of God (I Pet. 4:11) and "*Preach the word*" (II Tim. 4:2). God's *providence* depended in large measure on Moses' faithfully speaking the commands of God; to fail in this critical area would *jeopardize* the souls of the people and the nation. Their safety and well-being depended upon their unswerving loyalty to God's covenant, which Moses had revealed so faithfully; he would plead from

the depths of his heart and with every fiber of his being that the second generation give strict heed to God, so that He could be gracious to them, fulfill His promises, and save their souls.

How would the new generation handle the past? First, they would follow their new leader, Joshua, who had already been appointed.

And Jehovah said unto Moses, Take thee Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay thy hand upon him; and set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation; and give him a charge in their sight. And thou shalt put of thine honor upon him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may obey...And Moses did as Jehovah commanded him (Num. 27:18-22).

And, those who would divide the land of Canaan among the tribes were already named (Num. 34:16-29).

Second, they were to put the past behind them, except to learn from it.

Jehovah our God spake unto us in Horeb, saying, ye have dwelt long enough in this mountain: turn you, and take your journey.... Behold, I have set the land before you: go in and possess the land which Jehovah swore unto your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give unto them and to their seed after them (1:6-8).

Let the past humble you, show you your dependence upon God, produce genuine gratitude to God for His forgiveness and grace, and instill confidence to face the future. But, do not allow it to produce despair and debilitation. Realize that *“the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance”* (Rom. 2:4). Do not forget His grace!

God’s Character and His Providence

God’s providence grows out of His very nature. However, His children, indeed, all mankind can mis-

judge and misinterpret the actions of God. Perhaps the greatest, most unfortunate problem of the first generation was that they thought God hated them; can you imagine that, dear reader? And, naturally this influenced their response to God. Notice:

Yet ye would not go up, but rebelled against the commandment of Jehovah your God: and ye murmured in your tents, and said, Because Jehovah hated us, he hath brought us forth out of the land of Egypt, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us (1:26, 27).

They no doubt wondered, How in the world could God love us and yet at the same time allow us to experience such difficulties? Like them, many times we equate happiness with pleasure, money, social standing, health, houses and land, and comfort. We seem to have difficulty realizing that true happiness is experienced when people learn to trust and depend fully upon God; to give themselves to others and serve rather than be served; to undergo hardship so that patience might be developed; and to mourn so that genuine, lasting comfort might be gained. At times, discipline seems grievous; likewise, the sufferings and rigors of this life can be misunderstood. Such can affect one's perception of the character of God, giving him a skewed, distorted, warped picture of the Almighty. This brought the Jews' downfall in the wilderness. One does not seek to serve a person whom he perceives as hating him. How tragic was their mistake! Moses sought to correct this error.

God is holy.. He is utterly and perfectly opposed to all evil; He smote Sihon and Og, wicked kings (1:4). On the other hand, He encourages, promotes, and blesses the faithful and is the very epitome of Truth, righteousness, and goodness. His warnings against heathenism and corruption (moral and religious) must be heeded (Deut. 28). See also Deuteronomy 30:15-20.

God keeps His Covenants. His command was, *"Behold, I have set the land before you: go in and*

possess the land which Jehovah sware unto your fathers...to give unto them and to their seed after them" (1:8; cf. Gen. 26:3). He said also, "*Jehovah your God hath multiplied you, and, behold, ye are this day as the stars of heaven for multitude*" (1:10; cf. Gen. 15:5). Indeed, God did "*make you a thousand times as many as ye are, and bless you, as he hath promised you*" (1:12). Ultimately through Abraham and his descendants, the promised Seed would come (Gen. 3:15; 12:1-3; Gal. 4:4). Nothing could alter God's covenant (Gal. 3:20; Heb. 6:13-20; Psm. 89:3-5, 33-37).

God is sovereign. He is the Ruler of the universe; His sovereign providence is not subject to anyone else's permission, investigation, or blessing, nor do the laws of nature depend upon chance and evolution. He created the universe and has the sole, full, unquestioned sovereignty over it. When He said, "*I have given you the land,*" "*I have given you the city,*" "*I have given Esau Mount Sier,*" "*I have given Lot Ar,*" who could dispute it? (2:5, 9). Who could undermine His purpose? Who could gainsay the conditions to be met? Who could run the Sovereign out of His universe? Who could call Him into account? What fool could intimidate God by shaking his fist in His face on calling upon God to interrupt His divine plan and rule to strike the "*intellectual,*" athiestic, professorial braggart dead on the spot? (Psm. 14:1). Such pomposity will neither surprise nor shake the faith of the youth who knows God; the very fact that God is attacked so viciously proves His existence!

God is all-knowing. "*He knoweth thy walking through this great wilderness: these forty years Jehovah thy God hath been with thee; thou has lacked nothing*" (2:7). He knew their needs and met them; He knew their ways, rewarding the righteous and punishing the wicked. He knew just what was needed to help Israel make it all the way home to Canaan. Miraculously and providentially, God protected, guided, and fed them. He knew their fears and comforted them. He understood their

loneliness and accompanied them. He knew their weaknesses and strengthened them. They worried about the future, but He knew the future and just how long and how hard the road would be. Indeed, they were not alone.

God is the loving Father. Not only did God fight for His people in Egypt (1:30), but *“in the wilderness, where thou has seen how that Jehovah thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went, until ye came unto this place”* (1:31). He even *“went before you in the way, to seek you out a place to pitch your tents in, in fire by night, to show you by what way ye should go, and in the cloud by day”* (1:33). And, He disciplined them also as a father.

God is forbearing and longsuffering. Time after time, Israel provoked the Lord to jealousy, with their murmuring, with the golden calf, with their unbelief, with their false charges against God; yet, God was patient with His people. Peter says,

The Lord...is longsuffering to you-ward, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (II Pet. 3:9).

Finally, for the first generation, His patience was depleted. Their unbelief made them unfit to enter the promised land.

God is just. In righteous anger, because of His very nature, God said,

Surely there shall not one of these men of this evil generation see the good land (1:36).

Even Moses was forbidden to enter; he said,

Their little ones, who were not accountable, they shall go in thither, and unto them will I give it, and they shall possess it (1:39).

Note who would also enter in: Caleb, *“because he hath wholly followed Jehovah”* (1:36).

God's justice is also clearly seen in the decreed destruction of the Canaanites, for the iniquity of the Amorite would then be full (Gen. 15:16). When Israel said to Sihon king of Heshbon,

Let me pass through thy land: I will go along by the highway, I will turn neither unto the right hand nor to the left. Thou shalt sell me food for money, that I may eat; and give me water for money, that I may drink: only let me pass through on my feet,

Sihon refused to let Israel pass through. Like Pharaoh in Egypt, who defied God's command, Sihon set his course wilfully against God. Thus,

Jehovah thy God hardened his spirit (as He did Pharaoh's), and made his heart obstinate, that he might deliver him into thy hand, as at this day...Behold, I have begun to deliver up Sihon and his land before thee: begin to possess, that thou mayest inherit his land.... And Jehovah our God delivered him up before us, and we smote him, and his sons, and all his people. And we took his cities at that time... (2:27-34).

The Lord is longsuffering, but He is just.

Jehovah is slow to anger, and abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression; and that will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generation (Num. 14:18).

God's Providence and Help to His People

God "*would have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth*" (I Tim. 2:4); for this cause, Christ Jesus "*gave himself a ransom for all*" (v. 5). This was, of course, His desire for the Jews as they were traveling toward Canaan.

One would think, perhaps, that after the nation escaped slavery in Egypt, after their enemies were drowned in the Red Sea, after they had freedom, and

while they had sufficient provisions from God, He would permit them simply to settle down, rest, and enjoy their security. But, their travel toward their destination was only begun. Their freedom was to be maintained, and there was work to be accomplished.

The providence of God included placing the Israelites under law. Liberty without law is license. Yes, they were saved from their taskmasters, but the commands of God would enable them to maintain that freedom. License to do anything, anytime, to anyone leads to anarchy. A dictatorship will often result, and thereby, the circumstances return full circle to slavery. So, at Horeb, God gave commandments to Israel (1:3; Exod. 20). The grace of God's deliverance from Egypt did not alleviate the necessity of law; likewise, children of God today, Christians, are under law to Christ (I Cor. 9:21; James 1:25; Rom. 8:2).

The providence of God challenged Israel to industry, obedience, work. "Ye have dwelt long enough in this mountain: turn you, and take your journey" (1:6, 7). Freedom from Egypt did not mean the journey was ended. Yes, they saw God's holiness and majesty at Sinai; now, they were to turn their faith into action, works of obedience, efforts of achievement. Indeed, the wilderness would be a place of struggle, pain, and hardship, but the land flowing with milk and honey was beyond the wilderness, and beyond Jordan's stormy banks.

God's *providence* had given them a well-trained leader, Moses (schooled and brought up in the house of Pharaoh, perhaps to be the next Pharaoh), had provided protection in the land of Goshen for them to grow into a great nation (from seventy souls to above two million souls), and had taught the people how to live as a nation (by their having observed firsthand the most powerful nation on earth – Egypt). Now, He had given them the law of Moses and the pattern for the tabernacle, which they had built and in which He took up His abode in their

midst (showing the great condescension of God, dwelling among His people, from which He spake to Moses) (Exod. 40:34-Lev. 1:1). Indeed, it was time to march toward Zion! Faith without works is dead (James 2:24). People of faith are always busy (Heb. 11).

The providence of God provided leaders of the people. As noted above, Moses was Israel's first great leader. God knew him face to face; He selected Moses at the burning bush. Like Gideon, Isaiah, and the apostles, Moses felt inadequate for the task at hand – delivering God's people. God said, I can use a humble person like that. This man of peace was followed by another leader, carefully prepared, Joshua, a real fighter, a general. He would lead in conquering Canaan.

Other leaders were suggested (Exod. 18:13-27) by Jethro, in which Moses delegated some authority to a group of judges, or assistants. *“Take you wise men, and understanding, and known, according to your tribes, and I will make them heads over you”* (1:13). Their work was to, *“Hear the causes between your brethren, and judge righteously between a man and his brother, and the sojourner that is with him”* (1:16). They were not to respect persons but to demonstrate courage – *“for the judgment is God's”* (1:17). Please notice that they were in a vital position; their authority came from God. Though selected and appointed by the people [from among themselves], they became God's representatives. Leading God's people is a serious duty, trust, and work! One can see God's marvelous providence in their selection, integrity, and function. How out of place for a person to lead from an impure motive; or make decisions based on bias, prejudice, or respect of persons; or proceed from *“expediency”* rather than principle; or be motivated by self-will! Under such circumstances, how could it be said that *“the judgment is God's”*? The selection of those judges are reminiscent of the selection of those to wait on tables in the early Jerusalem church (Acts 6:1-6).

The providence of God guided the children of Israel through the wilderness. Having been at Horeb long enough, Israel was urged on to greater heights. “*Turn you, and take your journey*” (1:7). At first, as in the case of Abraham, perhaps, one may not see the reasoning; however, the One whom we serve has His eye always on the end of the journey. Christ urged, “*No one cometh unto the Father, but by me.*” His thoughts were on the mansions (John 14:1-6). God’s ultimate purpose for man is that he receive the crown (Rev. 2:10; II Tim. 4:6-8; Phil. 3:13, 14). God knew the way to Canaan; it could not be achieved by inactivity, by remaining at Horeb. However, *progress* would not necessarily be pleasant and easy; the wilderness held many dangers! But, as noted earlier, God led them and preceded them on the journey (1:32, 33); He marked the way. They were an integral part of His plan; the salvation of each was foremost in His mind and heart. Even when they passed through others’ territory, He had a plan for their food and water (2:6, 7); “*Jehovah thy God hath been with thee; thou hast lacked nothing.*” He fought for them (1:29, 30); He bare them “*as a man doth bear his son*” (1:31). Woe is he who is depending on his own strength; he will be overcome and destroyed.

The providence of God enabled Israel to gain strength through suffering. How often are the questions asked, “Why do I have to suffer?” “Why must there be burdens to bear?” Moses asked Israel, “*How can I myself alone bear your cumberance, and your burden, and your strife?*” (1:12) Dear reader, that is life. Life was not always easy for Abraham, Job, Moses, Jeremiah, John the Baptist, Paul, or even the only begotten Son of God; why should I expect to be exempt? Each day has its own burdens and troubles (Matt. 6:34). And, of course, each one’s burden seems to him the greatest and most difficult of all burdens. Like David, we often plead, O Lord, Let me take the wings of the dove, “*fly away, and be at rest*” (Psm. 55:6).

Was not the wilderness, with its dangers, hardships, and trials, especially suitable to the task of shaping and preparing the nation for the rigors of conquering the land of Canaan? Did it not teach them to place their full trust and confidence in the Lord? Would they have learned this invaluable and necessary lesson without the deprivation, rigor, and toil of the wilderness? That is where they got their schooling – the “school of hard knocks,” as it were. When Job finally began to see that he was being tried [but not as a punishment or chastisement, he thought], he said, “*But He knoweth the way that I take; when He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold*” (Job 23:10). The Lord knew what he could endure; Job would come forth as gold because he had been pure gold all along. His way had been and continued to be God’s way. “*My foot hath held fast to his steps; His way have I kept, and turned not aside*” (v. 11). He did not understand it, but he endured it patiently (James 5:11).

Note the reason for Israel’s trials.

And thou shalt remember all the way which Jehovah thy God hath led thee these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble thee, to prove thee, to know what was in thy heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments or not. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by everything that proceedeth out of the mouth of Jehovah doth man live. Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years. And thou shalt consider in thy heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so Jehovah thy God chasteneth thee” (8:2-5).

Dear friend, you and I need this type training to fit us for Heaven. It increases our sense of dependence upon God, it helps us to be humble, it increases our compassion for others who bear grievous burdens – really, it makes us more like the Lord, who suffered so much for

us. It really does cause God's people to realize that we are but strangers and pilgrims here; we seek to go home to that better land, which is beyond the Jordan. Indeed, suffering is a part of God's providential plan, designed to shape one's spirituality for eternity.

The providence of God gave good gifts to the Israelites. Just as God gave Mount Seir to Esau and Ar to Lot (Deut. 2:5, 9), He would give Canaan to Israel, that land of plenty which His providence furnished for His own people. The provisions and victories in the wilderness (2:24-37) assured them of ultimate victory. "*Jehovah our God delivered him [Sihon] up before us, and we smote him, and his sons, and all his people*" (v. 33). He would be with them unto the end (Matt. 28:20).

God's Providence Jeopardized

In spite of all God's loving provisions of grace, the first generation failed to enter Canaan. Why? How? "*Yet ye would not go up, but rebelled against the commandment of Jehovah your God.*" They accused God of hating them. They accepted not His grace, and perished because of unbelief and disobedience (1:26, 27). For that generation, it was at Kadesh-barnea either now or never. They rejected God's providence; they seized not the opportunity; they turned back; they backslid; they perished. How many alien sinners have sinned away the day of grace, children of God abandoned the life of faithfulness, congregations left their first love! They **would not** go up – emphatic, willfull rebellion. They deliberately turned their backs on God's providence. Notice the tragic description of their condition when later (after likely determining that risking their lives was better than forty years in the wilderness) they resolved *to* go up. "*Then ye answered and said unto me, We have sinned against Jehovah, we will go up and fight.*" God commanded Moses to tell them not to go fight. Moses spoke to them thus,

So I spake unto you, and ye harkened not; but ye rebelled against the commandment of Jehovah, and were presumptuous, and went up into the hill country. And the Amorites, that dwelt in that hill-country, came out against you, and chased you, as bees do, and beat you down in Seir, even unto Hormah. And ye returned and wept before Jehovah; but Jehovah harkened not to your voice, nor gave ear unto you (1:41-45).

Lack of faith gives Satan the opportunity greatly to magnify the size of the opposition and foes of God's people; thus, one must ever *increase* his faith and *keep* his eyes on the Lord (Heb. 12:1, 2). Please! Let us not fight against God's providence.

Conclusion

God wants to provide for His people; He loves us more than we can possibly imagine, though some have thought He hated them. Many lessons can be learned from the nation of Israel and from Deuteronomy 1-2. One, one can learn about God's providence by studying His dealings with past generations. Two, the commands of God must be neither altered nor rejected. Three, one must correct the deeds of the past and press on toward the goal (Phil. 3:12-14). Four, the Christian must accept God's forgiveness and grace, also forgiving himself. Five, God's nature can be misunderstood. Six, the toils and trials of life can have a faith-building, strengthening, positive effect upon the soul.

Seven, God is holy and just in all His dealings with man. Eight, the Lord will fulfill His promises; He has sworn by His very own nature. Nine, no one can confound God's plan. Ten, God knows His children's needs all the way home to Heaven. Eleven, He is longsuffering with His offspring. Twelve, the justice of God will not allow Him to pass over one unrequited sin or rebellion. Thirteen, Christians are "workers for the Lord." Fourteen, faith and grace do not rule out law and obedience. Law is necessary for freedom to exist.

Fifteen, leaders among God's people are God's representatives; thus, they are to be ever mindful that "the judgment is God's." This rules out the place of the self-willed, unsound, egotist in the eldership, etc. The will of God and the good of God's people must always be uppermost in one's mind. Sixteen, there is and can be but one guide to Heaven (John 14:1-6). Seventeen, suffering and trials help us to cultivate patience, humility, compassion, and desire to serve others. Really, is that not what life is all about? Eighteen, one can presumptuously and stubbornly reject God's providence, to his own everlasting shame and terrible, tragic destruction.

Please, dear reader, respond to the Lord in loving, trusting obedience today, while opportunity remains. Indeed, the Lord provides! And, heavenly Canaan awaits the faithful!

What Does Acts 7:1-53 Teach About The Providence Of God?

Kenneth Gossett

This study of God's providence, (by providence meaning that God is a great provider, and that the hand of God is active, particularly in the lives of some men for the purpose of reaching a certain goal or objective) begins with Stephen, a member of the church in Jerusalem before the dispersion or the scattering of the saints from that city which was caused by persecution (Acts 8:1-4).

This courageous man became a disciple of Christ by hearing, believing and being baptized (Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 2:41; 4:4). Soon he was elevated to a work of prominence among the disciples by being appointed with six of his brethren to "*serve tables*." His name heads the list of those selected to administer the daily distribution of life's necessities among the disciples so that the Grecian widows would not be neglected. He was particularly suited to this work, being a man "*full of faith and of the Holy Ghost*." He was also a man of honesty and wisdom (Acts 6:1-6). Such a person is always a ready and useful vessel in the hands of the Lord. Stephen, like John the Baptist, and a great host of other preachers and prophets of the Old Testament and New Testament, was a man sent from God.

His work soon extended beyond benevolent duties

to the field of teaching and the working of miracles and wonders which he did among the people. Shortly thereafter, he was called before the council in Jerusalem, accused of speaking blasphemous words against God and Moses. The false witnesses (a ploy often used by those who are defeated by the truth) said:

This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place and shall change the customs which Moses delivered unto us (Acts 6:8-14).

With the high court (the Sanhedrin) convened, the false witnesses having presented their baseless charges, and the face of Stephen being seen as the face of an angel, the high priest asked the accused: "*Are these things so?*" Like so many questions raised in controversy, this one did not lend itself to a simple "yes" or "no" answer. Instead Stephen gave the following reply:

Brethren and fathers, hearken: The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, and said unto him. Get thee out of thy land and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall show thee. Then came he out of the land of the Chaldeans, and dwelt in Haran: and from thence, when his father was dead, God removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell: and he gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: and he promised that he would give it to him in possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child. And God spake on this wise, that his seed should sojourn in a strange land, and that they should bring them into bondage, and treat them ill, four hundred years. And the nation to which they shall be in bondage will I judge, said God: and after that shall they come forth, and serve me in this place. And he gave him the covenant of circumcision: and so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac begat Jacob, and Jacob the twelve patriarchs. And the patriarchs,

moved with jealousy against Joseph, sold him into Egypt and God was with him and delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favor and wisdom before Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house. Now there came a famine over all Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction: and our fathers found no sustenance. But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent forth our fathers the first time. And at the second time Joseph was made known to his brethren; and Joseph's race became manifest unto Pharaoh. And Joseph sent, and called to him Jacob his father, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls. And Jacob went down into Egypt; and he died, himself and our fathers; and they were carried over unto Shechem, and laid in the tomb that Abraham bought for a price in silver of the sons of Hamor in Shechem. But as the time of the promise drew nigh which God vouchsafed unto Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt till there arose another king over Egypt, who knew not Joseph. The same dealt craftily with our race, and illtreated our fathers, that they should cast out their babes to the end they might not live. At which season, Moses was born and was exceeding fair; and he was nourished three months in his father's house, and when he was cast out, Pharaoh's daughter took him up, and nourished him for her own son. And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians; and he was mighty in his words and works. But when he was well-nigh forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel. And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, smiting the Egyptian; and he supposed that his brethren understood that God by his hand was giving them deliverance; but they understood not. And the day following he appeared unto them as they strove, and would have set them at one again, saying, Sirs, ye are brethren; why do ye wrong one to another? But he that did his neighbor wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us? Wouldest thou kill me, as thou killest the Egyptian yesterday? And Moses fled at this saying and became a sojourner in the land of Midian, where he begat two sons. And when forty years were fulfilled, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness

of Mount Sinai, in a flame of fire in a bush. And when Moses saw it, he wondered at the sight: and as he drew near to behold, there came a voice of the Lord. 'I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob.' And Moses trembled and durst not behold. And the Lord said unto him, Loose the shoes from thy feet; for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. I have surely seen the affliction of my people that is in Egypt, and have heard their groaning, and I am come down to deliver them; and now come, I will send thee into Egypt. This Moses whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? him hath God sent to be both a ruler and a deliverer with the hand of the angel that appeared to him in the bush. This man led them forth, having wrought wonders and signs in Egypt, and in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness forty years. This is that Moses, who said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall God raise up unto you from among your brethren, like unto me. This is he that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel that spake to him in the Mount Sinai, and with our fathers; who received living oracles to give unto us; to whom our fathers would not be obedient, but thrust him from them, and turned back in their hearts unto Egypt, saying unto Aaron, Make us gods that shall go before us; for as for this Moses who led us forth out of the land of Egypt, we know not what is become of him. And they made a calf in those days, and brought a sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their hands. But God turned, and gave them up to serve the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the prophets.

Did ye offer unto me slain beasts and sacrifices, Forty years in the wilderness, Oh house of Israel? And ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of the god Rephan, the figures which ye made to worship them: And I will carry you away beyond Babylon.

Our fathers had the tabernacle of the testimony in the wilderness, even as he appointed who spake unto Moses, that he should make it according to the figure that he had seen. Which also our fathers, in their turn, brought in with Joshua when they entered on the possession of the nations, that God thrust out before the face of our father, unto the days of David,

who found favor in the sight of God, and asked to find a habitation for the God of Jacob. But Solomon built him a house. Howbeit the Most High dwelleth not in houses made with hands: as saith the prophet,

The heaven is my throne, and the earth the footstool of my feet: What manner of house will ye build me? Or what is the place of my rest? Did not my hand make all these things?

Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets did not your father persecute? and they killed them that showed before of the coming of the Righteous One: of whom ye have now become betrayers and murderers; ye who received the law as it was ordained by angels, and kept it not.

J. W. McGarvey called this one of the most remarkable discourses on record.¹ Other students of the book of Acts most surely place it along side Peter's powerful discourse on Pentecost: the apostle's sermon at the house of Cornelius; Paul's sermon in Antioch in Pisidia; his Athenian address, his great speeches before the Jews in Jerusalem, and his defense speeches in Caesarea. Perhaps the instant and violent reaction of Stephen's auditors in which he became the Lord's martyr, more than anything else, enables us to have a proper estimate of the speech, a remarkable one indeed!

As Stephen responded to the question of the high priest, he seemed oblivious to the charges against him and instead, by the use of numerous examples from Israel's history, developed a case for charging the council and their allies with being "*stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears,*" a characteristic of many of their forefathers. At this point, they were charged with being betrayers and murderers of the Righteous One. This most recent crime was reminiscent of the sin of Joseph's brothers who sold him into slavery but who eventually had to appear before him to obtain food for their families. Likewise, Moses the great statesman and deliv-

erer, was often rejected by the very people whom he was charged to save. Then there was a host of God's prophets who were persecuted and slain as they delivered God's message to his rebellious people. The point of this speech was to identify the council with those who had been opposed to the way of God in the rejection of Joseph, Moses, the prophets, and now the ultimate rejection — the only begotten Son of God.

In the background of all the historical events and persons accounted before the court was the outstretched hand of God to a people, often lawless and indifferent to the very God whose name they wore and who had preserved and kept their very existence. Woven throughout this speech are numerous references to the acts of God among and on behalf of His people. Note the following:

(1) God appeared to Abraham in Mesopotamia; (2) he was directed to a land which the Lord promised to shew him; (3) after the death of his father in Haran, God removed Abraham to the land of promise; (4) Abraham did not personally inherit the land, yet God promised to give it to him and his seed when he was yet childless; (5) God foresaw and announced that Abraham's seed should experience bondage in a strange land, that the oppressor would be judged, and that Israel would be returned to the promised land where they would serve God; (6) God gave to Abraham the covenant of circumcision; (7) God was with Joseph, after he was sold into Egypt, and gave him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh, leading to Joseph becoming the governor of Egypt; (8) God raised up Moses; (9) He later appeared to him in a burning bush in the wilderness of Sinai; (10) God saw the suffering of His people, and sent Moses to deliver them from Egyptian bondage; (11) This deliverance was accompanied by signs and wonders which God did by the hands of Moses in Egypt, at the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years; (12) Moses was inspired to foretell the coming of a prophet which the Lord would

raise up — Jesus the Christ; (13) God gave to Moses the living oracles to give to Israel; (14) When Israel worshipped the golden calf at Sinai, God gave them up to worship the host of heaven; (15) for this God prophesied against them; (16) God gave to Israel the tabernacle of witness which was brought into the land from which the Gentiles were driven out by the Lord unto the days of David (17) David found favor before God; (18) God's hand created all things, and therefore, God is too great to be limited to a physical temple as the prophets had said; (19) the influence of the Holy Ghost, though rejected, was brought to bear upon the people; (20) God sent prophets to tell of the coming of the Righteous One; (21) God gave the law by the disposition of angels, and finally, (22) the Righteous One was sent, but like Moses, Joseph and the prophets, was rejected.

Conclusion

Never in history of ancient Israel, from the call of Abraham to the coming of Christ, the historical period covered in this address, was the providential hand of God absent from this people. At times, God's blessings came to Israel by supernatural works (miracles) and at other times by His natural laws. Specifically now, what does the address of Stephen as recorded by Luke in Acts 7:2-53 teach about the providence of God?

I. Purpose And Providence

Running like a golden thread throughout the history of Israel was the ultimate purpose of God, giving continuity, direction and meaning to the lives of the people and the events of which they were a part. God called the players and wrote the script for the great drama of human redemption, which until the revelation of the mystery had caused prophets to search and angels to desire to look into. All of the lives and all of the events of the text now being considered were designed of God to *"fill up the time"* so that Jesus might come to save all

men, Jew and Gentile, from their sins.

While it was the case that God planted, watered, cultivated, nurtured and nourished the fleshly nation of Israel, today and since the cross, it is spiritual Israel, the church, which is the object of God's concern and care. Every book of the New Testament echoes this theme.

One of the greatest, perhaps the greatest, ascriptions of praise to the purpose and providence of God known to man is found in the first chapter of Ephesians (Eph. 1:3-14).

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ: even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blemish before him in love: having foreordained us unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ unto himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved: in whom we have our redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, making known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he purposed in him unto a dispensation of the fulness of the times, to sum up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens, and the things upon the earth; in him I say, in whom also we were made a heritage, having been foreordained according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his will, to the end that we should be unto the praise of his glory, we who had before hoped in Christ; in whom ye also, having heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, — in whom, having also believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is an earnest of our inheritance, unto the redemption of God's own possession, unto the praise of his glory.

R. C. Bell said of this passage: *"No other sentence in all the Bible involves more time, digs more deeply*

about the very roots of Christianity, or reveals more of the riches of God's wisdom and grace.”²

Certainly each act of God, from Abraham, and before, until the coming of Christ and the church was a link in a great chain of truth and mercy reaching across the years of time from eternity to eternity for the benefit of man, with his destiny in the balance.

When the perfected plan for man's salvation was fully known, the students of history and the Scriptures could look back over the centuries and marvel and wonder at the wisdom and power of God because God's purpose and providence ran in parallel lines.

God Works For Man Through Man

God's work is often done through the agency of human servants. In such cases the work of God and the work of man are one. The Lord said to Moses:

Put off thy shoes from thy feet: for the place where thou standest is holy ground. I HAVE SEEN, I HAVE SEEN THE AFFLICTION OF MY PEOPLE WHICH IS IN EGYPT, AND I HAVE HEARD THEIR GROANING, AND AM COME DOWN TO DELIVER THEM. AND NOW COME, I WILL SEND THEE INTO EGYPT. This Moses whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge: the same did God send to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush. He brought them out, after that he had shewed wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness forty years (Acts 7:33-36).

The deliverance of Israel from Egypt was truly the Lord's salvation but Moses was God's earthly agent in bringing it about.

And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will shew to you today: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more forever. THE LORD SHALL FIGHT FOR YOU, and ye shall hold your peace (Exo. 14:13-14).

In addition to these Old Testament references, there are numerous examples in the New Testament of God using human beings to work on behalf of others who were to become the heirs of salvation. Every case of conversion in the book of Acts illustrates this point. Note what is said of Paul and his companions upon their return to the church at Antioch after their first journey.

And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, **THEY REHEARSED ALL THAT GOD HAD DONE WITH THEM** and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles (Acts 14:27).

The Apostle to the Gentiles was fully aware and frequently wrote of God working through him for others?

For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. **BUT BY THE GRACE OF GOD I AM WHAT I AM:** and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; **BUT I LABOURED MORE ABUNDANTLY THAN THEY ALL; YET NOT I, BUT THE GRACE OF GOD WHICH WAS WITH ME.** Therefore whether it were I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed (I Cor. 15:9-11).

The question should be raised at this point: Does God today work for men through men? **SURELY HE DOES.** Godly parents who faithfully rear their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, elders who watch after the souls of those under their charge, and deacons who serve, surely are being used of God to accomplish His work.

Then there are the gospel preachers who study and give freely of their time and energy, largely in the interest of others. Faithful children of God work constantly to restore those who have been overtaken in a fault (Gal. 6:1). Sacrificial efforts are made daily to convert those who have gone off into error (James 5:19-20). Discipline on the part of faithful churches is another way that God

works through men to save men (I Cor. 5; II Thess. 3:14-15). This earth would be a dreary world in which to live if there were none righteous through whom God could work on behalf of their souls.

When Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem to deal with the issue of Christians being obligated to keep the law of Moses

...they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders and THEY DECLARED ALL THINGS THAT GOD HAD DONE WITH THEM (Acts 15:4).

Paul wrote eloquently of God working through men in I Corinthians:

Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, EVEN AS THE LORD GAVE TO EVERYMAN? I HAVE PLANTED, APOLLOS WATERED: BUT GOD GAVE THE INCREASE. So then neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth: but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor. FOR WE ARE LABOURERS TOGETHER WITH GOD: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building, ACCORDING TO THE GRACE OF GOD WHICH IS GIVEN UNTO ME, AS A WISE MASTER BUILDER, I HAVE LAID THE FOUNDATION, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereon (I Cor. 3:5-10).

The Church, God's people, must be recognized as the vessel through which God's blessings so often flow (Acts 13:1-3; Rom. 1:8; II Cor. 8:1-5; I Thess. 1:6-10).

Adam Clarke, in his comments on Exodus 16, wrote this timely statement of God and man working together:

God would have the Israelites continually dependent on himself for all of their supplies; but he would make them, in a certain way, workers with him. He provided the manna; they gathered and ate it. The first was God's work; the latter, their own. They could not produce the manna, and God would not

gather it for them. Thus, the providence of God appears in such a way as to secure the cooperation of man. Though man should plant and water, yet it is God who giveth the increase. But if man neither plant nor water, God will give no increase. We cannot do God's work, and he will not do ours. Let us, therefore, both in things spiritual and temporal, be workers together with HIM.

Miracles And Providence

Stephen says in Acts 7:36:

This man (Moses) led them forth, having wrought wonders and signs in Egypt, and in the Red Sea and in the wilderness forty years.

These great miraculous works were certainly in the form of bountiful blessings needed to sustain Israel and support Moses during the period referred to by Stephen. While God's laws in the world were certainly operative at this time, such as seed time and harvest. God saw fit to bypass them and provide for Israel's needs miraculously. Even so the method of supplying the manna was designed to cause Israel to trust God for the provisions of life. The manna came daily except on the Sabbath (Exod. 16). There was to be no hording or stockpiling. Paul refers to this to the Corinthians

...as it is written, He that gathered much had nothing over; and he that gathered little had no lack (II Cor. 8:15).

It will be recalled that Jesus taught his disciples to pray, "*Give us this day our daily bread*" (Matt. 6:11).

While miracles attended Israel at various times until their purpose for existence was fulfilled, by and large, God supplied their needs by established law, seed time and harvest, etc. In the early days of Christianity, miracles, wonders and signs were wrought among God's people, the Church. They served a specific purpose and had a limited duration (Mark 16:20; Heb. 2:1-4; I Cor.

13). Today God's blessings fail upon man through HIS LAWS, both natural and spiritual. To illustrate this point, God never saves any person in some special way. Everyone must comply with God's plan of salvation and this involves obeying the gospel (Acts 2:38; II Thess. 1:6-9).

Some Final Thoughts

Abraham, the friend of God and the father of the faithful, was used of God to receive the promise that in its fruition would bring Jesus the Christ into the world. God used Abraham's faith to bless the world through him. Other great men of ancient Israel, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and Moses, were also used. Surely it is the case today that God is working through churches, preachers, elders, deacons, and all Christians as they faithfully follow the Lord. Realizing this to be so, may all who hear these lectures and read these words, resolve to be "*workers together with God.*"

Endnotes

1 J. W. McGarvey, **New Commentary on Acts Of The Apostles** (Gospel Light Publishing Company, Delight, Arkansas) p. 116.

2 R. C. Bell, **Studies In Ephesians** (Firm Foundation, Austin, TX), p. 3.

3 Adam Clarke, **Clarke's Commentary** (Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN) Vol. 1, p. 387.

Chapter 33

What Does Psalm 105:1-45 Teach About The Providence Of God?

Thomas F. Eaves, Sr.

The term providence is defined by Webster,

Divine guidance or care ... God, conceived of as guiding men through his foreknowledge, loving care, or intervention.¹

The **International Standard Bible Encyclopedia** states,

The doctrine of Divine providence, therefore, has reference to that preservation, care and government which God exercises over all things that he has created, in order that they may accomplish the ends for which they were created.²

Some authors divide the definition into two divisions,

In a wider sense of the term providence denotes the exercise of God's wisdom, omnipotence, and goodness; while in the narrower sense it signifies the guidance of the world toward the end appointed by God.³

We may therefore define divine providence as God sustaining and guiding human destiny.

The providence of God in no way violates the free will of man. An excellent illustration of this truth is seen in the example of the Pharaoh of Egypt (Exod. 7-11). Although the providence of God was evident, Pharaoh

continued to exercise his will and was rebellious till his death.

Since providence is God sustaining human destiny, He must of necessity have the power to sustain and guide the course of human history. Jehovah God is all powerful (Gen. 17:1), all knowing (Heb. 4:13), and ever present (Jer. 23:24). These divine characteristics insure his ability to direct the destiny of His creation.

The Greatness Of Jehovah

Psalm 105:1-7

Psalm 105:1-7 reflects the greatness of Jehovah as Israel is called to worship Him. God's people were summoned to: give thanks, call upon His name, and make known His deeds (v. 1), sing, talk (v. 2), glory and rejoice (v. 3), seek (v. 4), and remember (v. 5). The reasons for this praise was God's doings (v. 1), marvelous works (v. 2), strength (v. 4), and judgments (v. 5). The introduction ends with the great affirmation, "*He is Jehovah our God*" (v. 7).

God's Covenant With Abraham

Psalm 105:8-11

As Israel was exhorted to remember, the Psalmist now affirms that God has remembered His covenant forever. The covenant was made with Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3), the same oath was established with Isaac (Gen. 26:2-5), and confirmed to Jacob (Gen. 28:10-15). The covenant God made with Abraham included several promises, all of which through God's providence provided salvation to the whole world. God promised Abraham that: He would make of him a great nation, bless him, make his name great, bless those who blessed him, curse those who cursed him, bless all the nations of the earth through him, and would give his seed the land of Canaan (Gen. 12:1-7). From the time that Jehovah God made His covenant with Abraham, He, through His providence, began to bring His promises to

fruition. His providential care for Abraham and other patriarchs while they were waiting for the fulfillment of God's promises speaks to us of the care God takes of His children during their earthly sojourn while they are on this side of heavenly Canaan. Paul declared in I Corinthians 10:11,

Now these things happened unto them by way of example; and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come.

The same truth is taught in Romans 15:4. From our vantage point it is a thrilling experience to view the complete picture and see God's love, protection, guidance, and sustaining care as He fulfilled His promises to Abraham and his seed.

God's Care For His People Psalm 105:12-15

The covenant God made to Abraham was spoken when they were but a few men in number (v. 12). Abraham was called while all alone (Isa. 51:2). Abraham had two sons, the one born of the handmaiden was cast out. Isaac also had two sons and one was forced from his home country for many years. Jacob had more sons and out of the loins of his twelve sons came a mighty nation. The covenant was made not when Israel was mightier than Egypt (Exod. 1:9) nor when they numbered above 600,000 fighting men, but when they were few in order that the power of God might be manifest, and that His name might be glorified.

While they were few in number they sojourned in a land which was theirs by promise (Heb. 11:13). During this time God protected them and "*suffered no man to do them wrong*" (v. 14). The inspired writer proclaims that, "*a terror of God was upon the cities that were round about them, and they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob*" (Gen. 35:5). It is extremely comforting today for God's children when we realize that the same God, who

providentially cared for his chosen people, Israel, provides the same care for spiritual Israel. God's only begotten Son stated,

...and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand (John 10:28).

The apostle Paul instructed the Roman Christians that

...nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:38-39).

The same apostle writing to the church at Corinth said,

There hath no temptation taken you but such as man can bear: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation make also the way of escape, that ye may be able to endure it (I Cor. 10:13).

From Psalm 105 and other passages we learn that God loves His children and providentially cares for them.

God's care and protection extended even to rulers of nations. Pharaoh the king of Egypt learned this lesson the hard way (Gen. 12:17) as did Abimelech (Gen. 20:7-8).

God's Promises Fulfilled

Psalm 105:16-45

The Famine Comes – Psalm 105:16

There was famine in all the lands (Gen. 41:54), but through the providence of God there was bread in the land of Egypt. Joseph had gone into Egypt years before to provide for the coming of the seventy souls into Egypt (Exod. 1:5). He went not as an ambassador or government official, but as a slave. Joseph the dreamer (Gen. 37:5) was hated by his brethren (Gen. 37:8, 11) and sold into slavery for twenty pieces of silver (Gen. 37:28, Gen. 39:1). While his brothers desired to do evil to Joseph, he

recognized the hand of God in these transactions (Gen. 50:20-21). While in Egypt Joseph was made lower than a slave, he became a prisoner (Gen. 39:20). In prison Joseph was blessed by God and was in charge of all the prisoners (Gen. 39:22-23). After interpreting the dreams of the chief butler and chief baker, Joseph was brought to the attention of Pharaoh who was very perplexed about a dream involving seven fat and seven lean cows and seven fat ears and seven lean ears of grain. After Joseph had given Pharaoh the correct meaning of the dream he was elevated to a position second only to Pharaoh (Gen. 41:40). Through God's guidance Joseph executed a plan by which grain would be stored during the seven years of plenty thus providing food for the coming years of famine. When the famine came over all the land, Jacob sent his sons to Egypt to buy grain. Eventually Israel came into and sojourned in the land of Ham or Goshen (Gen. 46:34). In Egypt, Israel's descendants became keepers of the flocks of the Egyptians. As shepherds were an abomination to the Egyptians, Israel and his descendants were isolated from them (Gen. 46:34). Again the providence of God becomes evident as he protects the blood line of the coming Messiah.

A Deliverer Is Sent – Psalm 105:26

While in Egypt the descendants of Jacob (Israel) increased to the point that they were stronger than their adversaries (Exod. 1:9). Shortly after exiting from Egypt the fighting men numbered 603,550. Because of their strength they were hated and feared by their captors (Exod. 1:1). When the children of God began to cry out because of their adversities he raised up Moses to deliver them from their enemies. The Genesis account tells us that when Moses and Aaron delivered God's message to Pharaoh that the king's heart was hardened. Three times Moses states that Pharaoh hardened his heart and hearkened not unto God's instructions (Exod. 8:15, 32; 9:34), two times the Scripture indicates that

Pharaoh's heart was hardened (Exod. 8:19; 9:35), and five times God is said to have hardened Pharaoh's heart (Exod. 9:12; 10:20, 27; 11:10; 14:8). There are many Pharaoh's in our world, some in the church and some outside, they have their minds made up as to the particular life style they are going to follow and they do not intend for anybody or anything to deter them. When these modern day Pharaoh's come into contact with God's word they rebel, harden their hearts. Thus God's word (His demand for righteous lives) hardens their heart because they are unwilling to bend their will to God's demand. Matthew speaks of these Pharaohs in Matthew 13:14-15. Such was the case of the Pharaoh of Egypt, he had his desires and even Jehovah God was not going to change him. To encourage Pharaoh to release His people God sent ten plagues to accomplish His will. All of the ten plagues mentioned in Exodus are spoken of except murrain and boils. Those plagues are called signs and wonders of Jehovah (v. 27). In obeying the instructions of God, Moses and Aaron became a part of God's providential workings to free His people. Can you imagine Moses telling Aaron, we have never done this before, or it will never work, or what will people think? Aaron could have suggested that such action would be like the heathen nations. We must realize that these signs were a part of the providential plan of Jehovah to accomplish His will. One of the greatest lessons we can learn from Psalm 105 is that when we fail to obey God we may very well be thwarting (in our lives) the providential working of God! This could be in the area of evangelism, discipline, benevolence, etc. What a tremendous lesson for all Christians today, but especially for preachers and elders. Of Moses and Aaron working as God's intermediaries Matthew Henry stated,

Moses and Aaron were not moved either with a foolish fear of Pharaoh's wrath or a foolish pity of Egypt's misery, to relax or retard any of the plagues which God ordered them to inflict on the Egyptians,

but stretched forth their hand to afflict them as God appointed. Those who are instructed to execute judgment will find their remissness constructed as rebellion against God's word.⁴

At the death of all the first born of Egypt Pharaoh released the children of God from his rule. As they left they asked the Egyptians for gold and silver. Whatever they asked the Egyptians gave to the point that Moses said they "*despoiled the Egyptians*" (Exod. 12:36). The Psalmist said that it was the work of God, "*and he brought them forth with silver and gold*" (v. 37). Some estimate that the great multitude which exited Egypt numbered several million people, and there was not a sick person among the group (v. 37). How great is the providential care of God for His people.

God Guides And Cares For His Journeying People – Psalm 105:39-43

As the children of Israel began their journey to the promise land God leads them every step of the way. By day God directed them by a pillar of cloud, by night a pillar of fire thus enabling them to travel both day and night (Exod. 13:21). When Christians (through their obedience) are released from the bondage of sin they also have a guide in their journey to spiritual Canaan. God's inspired word (II Tim. 3:16-17; II Peter 1:3) is to be their pillar of cloud and fire enabling them to serve God faithfully both day and night. While traveling, the children of Israel were fed with the bread of heaven (manna, Exod. 16:14), quails (Exod. 16:13), and quenched their thirst from water which came forth from a rock (Exod. 17:1-6; Num. 20:11). God supplied all of the people's needs even as He supplies all of man's needs today both physical and spiritual.

The exodus of God's children from the land of bondage was the fulfillment of a promise which had been made to Abraham years ago (Gen. 15:13-14). God always keeps His word (Titus 1:2)! The providential care

of Jehovah continued with His children until the time they possessed the promise land, the crossing of the Jordan (Josh. 3:1-13), the conquest of Jericho (Josh. 6:1) and many other events in which Jehovah manifested His power and care.

The Inheritance Realized

Psalm 105:44-45

The physical part (land promise) of Jehovah's covenant with Abraham is not fulfilled,

And he brought forth his people with joy, and his chosen with singing. And he gave them the lands of the nations (vv. 43-44b).

Also, as God had promised His children,

...great and goodly cities, which thou buildest not, and houses full of all good things, which thou fillest not, and cisterns hewn out, which thou hewest not, vineyards and live trees, which thou plantest not, and thou shall eat and be full (Deut. 6:10b-11).

Truly it was a land which flowed with milk and honey as God had promised (Exod. 3:8; 13:5). The land of Canaan is now Israel's, this portion of God's covenant is fulfilled as Joshua wrote,

So Jehovah gave unto Israel all the land which he swore to give unto their fathers: and they possessed it, and dwelt therein (Josh. 21:43).

All that God promised came to pass, there failed not aught of any good thing which Jehovah had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass (Josh. 21:45).

It is very enlightening to notice how many of the activities of Psalm 105 are attributed directly to the hand of God (vv. 14, 16, 17, 24-26, 28, 29, 31-34, 36, 37, 39-44). God works among His people!

In Thee Shall All The Nations Be Blessed

With the great emphasis placed upon the land promise an often overlooked portion of God's covenant with Abraham is the last phrase in Genesis 1:3 where God stated:

...and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

This portion of the covenant promises salvation to all mankind and was made possible through His only begotten Son (Acts 3:19-25; Gal. 3:8).

Sin entered the world when Adam and Eve were disobedient to God's instructions (Gen. 3; I John 3:4). Sin separated the first couple from God (Gen. 3:22-24) and continues to alienate man from his Creator (Isa. 59:1-2). The wages of sin is spiritual death (Rom. 6:23) which includes separation from the abundant life on earth (John 10:10) and eternal separation from God the Father (Matt. 25:46). Through Abraham's seed Jesus, the Messiah, came to take away the sins of the world (John 1:29).

The providence of God which was so evident in God's fulfilling the land promise to Abraham, continues as he provides the means of blessing all the nations. Jesus, born of the virgin Mary, was only a few years old when the enemies of God attempted to take His life (Matt. 2:16-18). God issued a warning to the wise men that they were not to return to Herod with the information concerning the location of His Son (Matt. 2:12). God directed those responsible for the well being of the infant Jesus as He guided and protected Israel in the long ago. Joseph was warned of God in a dream to take the child to Egypt (Matt. 2:13-15). God guided Joseph and Mary when Jesus was brought out to Egypt (Matt. 2:19), and when he was to be taken to Nazareth (Matt. 2:22-23). During His personal ministry on earth, when his enemies were seeking His life, He was delivered simply by "*passing through the midst of them went his way*" (Luke 4:29-

30). The providence of God cared for Jesus as He accomplished the work which would bring the blessing of all nations.

The universal opportunity of salvation is seen in such passages as Matthew 28:18, Mark 16:15-16; and Romans 1:16. Salvation becomes a reality only to those who are obedient (Heb. 5:8-9). The opportunity for this salvation exists through the sacrifice of God's Son, and there is salvation in none other (Acts 4:12). There is no remission without the shedding of blood (Heb. 9:22), and when Jesus shed His blood on the cross (John 19:34) the opportunity for salvation became a reality. This blessing, first promised to Abraham, is obtained by obedience. Faith is absolutely essential (John 8:24, 21; Heb. 11:6; Mark 16:16), and leads one to repent (Luke 13:3, 5; Acts 17:30), and to confess Jesus as God's only begotten Son (Matt. 10:32-33; Rom. 10:10; I Tim. 6:12-13), and to be baptized into Christ and His death (Rom. 6:1-6; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). In baptism the believing, penitent, confessing sinner comes into contact with or appropriates the cleansing power of the blood of Christ and is forgiven of all past sins. Becoming a new creature (II Cor. 5:17) God adds His new born child to the church (Acts 2:47). Each time one is born into the family of God the covenant God made with Abraham is ratified.

And so the beautiful story of Psalm 105 comes to a close. What have we learned of the providence of God from this Psalm?

1. The will of God will always be accomplished.
2. The providence of God never violates the free will of man.
3. God never fails His own and is able to save to the uttermost all those who put their trust in Him.
4. Obedient men, as Moses and Aaron, can be a part of the providential working of God.
5. God is active in the affairs of men. Let's not merely pay lip service to Romans 13:1 and Daniel 4:17 and other passages which teach that God rules in the

affairs of man.

6. Total obedience is necessary to be well pleasing to God.

As the Psalmist called Israel to remember the great works of God, we as Christians should remember that in the 20th century He still loves, cares for, and works providentially in the lives of His children. May God help us to realize the truth of Romans 8:28,

...and we know that to them that love God all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to his purpose.

Endnotes

1 **Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary**, 2nd ed. G. & C. Merriam Co., Springfield, Mass.

2 Wilbur F. Tillett, "*Providence*," **The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia**, James Orr, editor. Vol. IV, p. 2476.

3 C. A. Beckworth, "*Providence*," **The New Schaff Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge**, S. M. Jackson, editor. Vol. IX, p. 306.

4 **Matthew Henry's Commentary on The Whole Bible**, 6 vols, Vol. III. Job to Song of Solomon. Fleming H. Revell Co. Old Tappan, N. J. Vol. III, p. 637.

What Does The Book Of Job Teach About The Providence Of God?

Phil Davis

Introduction

Job had it all. If ever a man had been blessed of God, it was Job. He had a wife and ten fine children. He had livestock and lands. He had friends and influence. He had faith in God. He had *arrived*. Everything was going so well that those around him must have thought that by his righteous life, he had God “*in his hip pocket*.”

The furthest thought from Job’s mind was that in an instant he would be shoved from the pedestal that held him so high. Every “*prop*” a man normally depends upon to order and sustain life and sanity would be snatched away as though he had never had them.

How could he know that Satan, the father of all skepticism, would pose his name to God as a test of the moral makeup of all men? How could he conceive of the idea that not only would God implicitly raise the subject to the old Deceiver, but He would even permit the matter to go so far as to put Job “*in the middle*” (Cf.: “*Hast thou considered my servant Job...*” Job 1:8?)

Poor Job! An “*innocent bystander*.” He never asked to be exalted so highly, nor could he understand why, suddenly, he was brought so low. What had become of the **Providence Of God?**

Just so, our topic is to consider the concept of

providence in the book of **Job**. What were the questions that entered his mind; and how did he resolve them? What significance do they have for contemporary lives? There are a few of the matters we must attempt to understand as we study *“Providence In The Book Of Job.”*

...name of its unique and marvelous hero, Job. Job represents not only a great sufferer, but an honest doubter; he dared to doubt the theology of his day, a theology which he had himself doubtless believed until experience, the best of all teachers, taught him its utter inadequacy to explain the deepest problems of human life and of Divine providence. The purpose of this book in the inspired volume seems to be to correct the prevailing theology of the day with regard to the subject of sin and suffering in their relation to Divine providence. There is no more deplorable and hurtful error that a false theology could teach than that all suffering in this world is a proof of sin and a measure of one's guilt. It is hard enough for the innocent to suffer. To add to their suffering by teaching them that it is all because they are awful sinners, even though their hearts assure them that they are not, is to lay upon the innocent a burden to grievous to be borne.

Our major text of consideration (though the entirety of the book, as well as other Biblical references, must be studied for a complete picture), is found in the first through the third chapters of Job:

Job 1:1 – There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil. 2. And there were born unto him seven sons and three daughters. 3. His substance also was seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she asses, and a very great household; so that this man was the greatest of all the men of the east. 4. And his sons went and feasted in their houses, every one his day; and sent and called for their three sisters to eat and drink with them. 5. And it was so, when the days of their feasting was gone about, that Job sent and

sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually.

6. Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them. 7. And the Lord said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. 8. And the Lord said unto Satan, **Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?**

9. Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? 10. Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. 11. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face.

12. And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord.

13. And there was a day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house: 14. And there came a messenger unto Job, and said, The oxen were plowing, and the asses feeding beside them; 15. And the Sabeans fell upon them and took them away; yea, they have slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. 16. While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The fire of God is fallen from heaven, and hath burned up the sheep, and the servants, and consumed them; and I only am escaped alone to tell them. 17. While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The Chaldeans made out three bands, and fell upon the camels, and have carried them away, yea, and slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. 18. While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, Thy sons and thy

daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house: 19. And, behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they are dead; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. 20. Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, 21. And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord. 22. **In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.**

2:1. Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them to present himself before the Lord. 2. And the Lord said unto Satan, From whence comest thou? And Satan answered the Lord, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. 3. And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? and still he holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause.

4. And Satan answered the Lord, and said, Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life, 5. But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face. 6. And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life.

7. So went Satan forth from the presence of the Lord, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown. 8. And he took him a potsherd to scrape himself withal; and he sat down among the ashes. 9. Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die. 10. But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? **In all this did not Job sin with his lips.** (Emphasis added.)

How could Job retain his integrity? How could he remain faithful to an apparently hostile Heaven? Since

he wasn't even aware of the dialog behind the scenes of heaven's vesture how could he possibly be expected to respond properly in the face of the severest of tests with which a human can be faced? Was there anything left in the way of a blessing from God? Had providence forgotten its dependents? Why would it not have been better for Job either never to have been conceived, or to have died in the womb, or even to have died after birth? Could Job even know the answers? These and others must be considered in our studies. Let us outline our thoughts as follows:

- I. What Did God Originally Provide Job?
- II. What Did God Permit Satan To Take From Job?
- III. What Did Job Have In His Darkest Hour?
- IV. What Did God Give Back To Job?
- V. What Was Job Able To Gain From This Whole Experience? (And What Can We Learn From It?)

I. What Did God Originally Give To Job?

Once again, the *ISBE* provides some helpful thoughts:

A mistaken and hurtful notion has long been prevalent to the effect that special providence is designed to secure the secular and earthly good Material blessings may indeed come as a special providence to the child of God (Matt. 6:33f), but that "good" which all things work together to secure for them that love God is mainly spiritual good, and not financial, or social, or intellectual, or temporal good, except as these may secure ultimate spiritual good. Indeed, God's special providence may take away wealth and bring poverty in its stead in order to impart "true riches" it **may even bring death** instead of life – for sometimes a Christian can do more good by sickness or death than by health or continued life – and when that is the case, his

sickness or death may well be **interpreted as a special providence.** (Emphasis added.)

Originally, God did indeed bless Job with every imaginable advantage available to one living in that remote day and place. There was little that Job did not possess of a material nature. Yet, it appears (after the fact) that Job had never been put to the real test (concerning his faith) which would prove his “*mettle.*” Satan was not wrong in asking that Job be tested; he was only wrong in his assessment of the love and faithfulness of Job. Satan had basically said that given enough reason, Job would stop serving God. The clear implication is that Satan was alleging the lowest of mercenary motives in Job’s seeming allegiance to the heavenly Father. And yet, Job’s performance under fire by an unseen enemy showed this to be wrong. Job’s summary statement when urged by his wife to “*curse God and die*” was:

Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him (Job 13:15).

What did God originally provide Job? He gave him at least these: (1) Life; (2) Health; (3) Family; (4) Influence; (5) Friends (who turned false or at least very unhelpful); (6) A faith-producing and faith-maintaining environment; (7) Mercy (explained below); and probably a host of other benefits.

The mercy that God gave Job is mentioned in James 5:11:

Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.

Obviously, the mercy of the Lord did not appear in its fulness in the beginning of the book but was later to appear in the fact that the Lord stopped Satan short of destroying Job, and that the Lord returned to him even more than was taken from him. Even in light of all the

suffering Job endured, the Scriptures say that the Lord was merciful in his treatment of him.

When Paul stated these words,

For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal (II Cor. 4:16-18).

Paul was implying many lessons we need to learn about the suffering we endure.

Warren, in his book *Our God – A Sun And Shield For Troubled Hearts*, helps us to understand how this could be true. He suggests that *“Human suffering is light in comparison with what the sufferer actually deserves.”* This is far from the allegation of the false friends that Job’s sufferings were a direct result of his personal sins. (And God apparently provided Job a way to be aware of that fact.) God, through Jeremiah stated it this way:

Wherefore doth a living a man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins? (Lam. 3:39).

The *New American Standard Bible (NASB)* more clearly renders it,

Why should any living mortal (human being), or any man offer complaint in view of his sins?

Indeed, Job would have been out of place (as would any of us) offering any resistance to the justice of God should he decide to punish directly and immediately for the sins of our lives. Yet, the Lord does not do this. He was (and is) merciful in sparing Job as long as he was *“walking in the light”* of the revelation of God provided for that day (Cf.: the regular offering of sacrifices to God as his

religious duty).

One might wonder in this light at the words of Jesus:

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light (Matt. 11:28ff).

Yet the Lord was clearly implying that in contrast with the burden of degradation and destruction that Satan binds to the lives of his followers, any so-called burden that the Lord might place upon us would be light indeed. For the “burden” of the Lord is only that of a cross borne on the shoulder of a willing disciple. It is a burden that, like the athlete’s weight-lifting regimen, rather than tearing down, gradually, eventually builds up. Rather than degrading, it uplifts. It is no real load when compared with the benefits it yields.

Warren says, *“Human suffering is light in comparison with the blessings of having one’s sins forgiven.”* Surely Job realized, since he continually sacrificed to God, the importance of forgiveness of sins. (This is not intended to imply that one is making a “trade-off” of suffering for reward, but merely to say that God is blessing abundantly in providing the eternal home, and if a life in a suffering-prone world is either logically or chronologically precedent to that abode, the “trade” is well worth it. Cf. Matthew 16:25-26).

An advantage that we as Christians have over Job’s situation is Warren’s next suggestion: *“Human suffering is light in comparison with having Christ’s love to sustain us in times of tribulation (and) death.”* Indeed, Job had the knowledge that God is faithful and benevolent, but he could not have had the knowledge that

...we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of

grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need (Heb. 4:15f).

Still, Job understood that *“Human suffering is light in comparison with the glories of eternity in heaven,”* (Cf. Job 13:15). So, we see that God supplied Job all the material, emotional, and spiritual provisions necessary to his life.

II. What Did God Permit Satan To Take From Job?

When we look only from the human viewpoint, or rather the materialistic perspective, we think that Satan was allowed to take everything that made life worth living. Job was so miserable that many people in his situation would have decided that suicide was a reasonable alternative to his condition. Essentially, Job’s wife was saying,

You no longer have anything of any worth. God has forsaken you. Your health is gone. You are miserable and have no chance of getting any better. Why not just get your suffering over with (she thought) by committing ‘spiritual suicide’?

Job dismissed her foolish thoughts because his integrity would not allow him to deny the Lord who had always been his helper (Heb. 13:5, 6, 8). The *NASB* translates Job 2:10 very clearly in saying:

Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity.

Job regarded sin, not hardship and suffering, as the only inherent evil.

Yes, Satan was given complete freedom to do with Job’s condition what he wanted, short of taking the breath of life from him. Satan *was* able to put a severe strain on Job’s faith, but he hadn’t counted on the sincere servitude of God’s faithful follower. Job could

have denied God completely, but he did not.

III. What Did Job Have In His Darkest Hour?

What was left to Job? What did he have that kept him true to the God he served and restrained him from “*charging God foolishly*”? Perhaps his thoughts were like the Psalmist’s who wrote,

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever (Psm. 23:4ff).

Job’s dreaded valley could not take from him the central-most part of God’s providential supply: his faith. If one were required to distill the essential offerings that God’s providence proffers, when all those possessions one normally associates with providence are missing or removed (material goods, familial and emotional stability, etc.), he would be left with that which Job had by the providence of God. **God gave Job the means and the opportunity to maintain and even increase his faith despite (and in some ways, by means of) his situation.** And when we reduce the needs of our lives down to their barest essence, what more do we really need? Paul wrote in Philippians 4:19 of the promise that God would supply that which is necessary. And in Ephesians 3:20, we find the description of the boundless ability of our God to supply that which is best for us (cf. James 4:1-7).

Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us (Eph. 3:20).

Inspiration states in Romans 8:28,

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

This does not mean that all we want or think we need will be given us, but that if we love the Lord and are willing to be faithful unto Him regardless of the cost, no matter what may be the adversity, it **can be** for us an instrumentality of good and spiritual growth rather than that which would be an instrument of our eternal destruction. (Think of the statement of Joseph in Gen. 50:20 – *“But as for you, ye thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good”* – emphasis added). Chrysostom demonstrated this attitude when he wrote,

Hast thou suffered any evil? If thou wilt, it is no evil; give thanks to God, and the evil is turned to good. Glory be to God for all things.

So, in his darkest hour, Job had at least these: (1) his life; (2) his faith; (3) his doubts; (4) his torments and false friends; (5) God’s mercy (in limiting Satan’s devices and powers over him); and (6) the continued opportunity to worship and serve the Maker of all men, Jehovah God. It might well be said that each circumstance of life is an occasion of a choice to serve and draw nearer to God, or to reject Him and refuse to serve Him (Josh. 24:15; et al.).

IV. What Did God Give Back To Job?

Briefly, it may be said that God returned to Job twice that which had been taken from him in the great trial he underwent. But perhaps there should be this added note: God gave back to Job not only his strong faith, but even an increase in it. Now Job was vindicated. Now providence was proven reliable, just as Job had always thought it was. But now, Job even had more reason to be confident in his relationship with the Father. He had

unwittingly, by his very character, defeated the traps of the devil, and he had demonstrated that faith can be sincere and steadfast regardless of the tribulations associated with maintaining it (James 4:7, 8, 10). Satan was simply wrong in Job 2:4 when he said,

And Satan answered the Lord, and said, Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life.

Job was motivated by his authentic relationship with God.

Proper "*motivation*" to serve and obey God include the concepts of teleology (reward and punishment), deontology (duty), and agapism (love). Job's faithfulness had finally been reduced to the "*greatest of these.*" He had relied on love.

Job regained his good name formerly questioned by the allegations of the false friends. He also gained an even higher standing in God's estimation as evidenced in the use of his life as an example in the remainder of Scripture (or, alternatively, he confirmly by demonstration the confidence God had already placed in him). Finally, Job regained a proper respect for the sovereignty of God, and the realization that there are simply some matters about which man should not question God, and that, in fact, man has no adequate vantage point from which to judge the workings of God (which he largely cannot understand anyway [Rom. 9:14-23]).

V. What Was Job Able To Gain From This Whole Experience? (And What Can We Learn From It?)

What may we conclude from all of this? Surely the most important lesson to be learned is this: (1) ALL which providence eventually is "*obligated*" to supply us is a means and opportunity to remain faithful to (and become even more faithful toward) God. There is little else which really matters. When we consider a martyr such as Stephen (Acts 6), or even the Lord Jesus Himself

(not a martyr – Phil. 2:8), “*they loved not their lives unto the death*” (Rev. 12:11).

So we see that, regardless of our expectations, Divine providence is not **required**, in order to be faithful, to supply us any of “*the usual props*” man depends upon to sustain him, such as material and social possessions or afflictions, or even health. Nor must we even be given a sense of the understanding of the “*justice of a loving, good God permitting evil in the world*” (to “*innocent*” people). Indeed, life is all that must exist to maintain faith; and faith can be required to sacrifice life (Rev. 2:10ff).

(2) Ezekiel 14:14, considered in the context of the book of Job, proves that Job was able to deliver his own soul by his personal righteousness. This does not remove the necessity of the grace of God, but it does clearly demonstrate that God expects active, obedient faith and faithfulness in order to remain “*walking in the light.*” Job was able to realize the outcome of a faithful life:

that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls (I Peter 1:7-9; cf. Rom. 2:6; 6:22; Heb. 13:7; Psm. 119:67).

So, we too can learn the lesson of Job’s faithfulness.

(3) This ordeal of Job taught him that

....a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth (Luke 12:15).

Rather, this world is what has been called “*a vale of soul-making – man’s one and only probationary period.*” Job had to re-assess his presuppositions about the nature of existence if he did not already realize this principle.

The *ISBE* states,

We venture to affirm that the controlling thought in the mind of God in establishing this order of things, of which we are a conscious part, was to create a race of beings who should find their **highest happiness** by being in the **highest degree holy**.... (emphasis added).

And so our entire lives are centered around glorifying God and arriving in heaven, no matter the price.

(4) Job's reaction to trial vindicated human nature's potential for a relatedness to God unadulterated by ulterior motives.

(5) We can learn, as could Job, that

all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose (Rom. 8:28).

If we truly want to go on serving God, no matter the circumstances or difficulty, we can find some positive outcome. Some have described this as God's bringing the good out of evil. Perhaps a more satisfactory way to phrase it is, *"Every circumstance is an opportunity."* Whether trials become instrumentalities of evil or of good is up to our attitudes, perceptions, and reactions. There is no way our salvation can be taken from us by Satan or anyone else as long as we don't throw it away (Heb. 2:1ff).

Conclusion

There are too many lessons on providence to be gleaned from Job for us to consider them all (for example, the relationship of prayer and providence viewed from the vantage-point of James 5:16ff). Still, one of the most important ideas that we can surmise is this: the fact that God is interested enough in us to include this book (and all the rest of the Bible) in the canon of Scripture, along with the other blessings that are ours from day to day indicates that He is indeed providing for our needs even till now (II Peter 1:3 – *all*

things that pertain unto life and godliness”).

Let us end our thoughts with this final, mostly accurate citation from the *ISBE*:

...the **special contribution of the Book of Job to the doctrine of Divine providence, as already indicated, is to set forth its connection with the fact of sin and suffering.** Perplexed souls in all ages have been asking: If God be all-powerful and all-good, why should there be any suffering in a world which He created and over which He rules? If He cannot prevent suffering, is He omnipotent? If He can, but will not prevent suffering, is He infinitely good? Does the book solve the mystery? We cannot claim that it does (this could be misleading – p.d.). But it does vindicate the character of God, the Creator, and of Job, the **mortal free agent under trial.** It does show the place of suffering in a moral world where free **agents are forming character;** it does show that perfect moral character is made, not by Divine omnipotence, but by trial, and that physical suffering serves a moral end in God’s providential government of man and nations. While the book does not clear the problem of mystery, it does show how on the dark background of a suffering world the luminous holiness of Divine and human character may be revealed. The picture of this suffering man of Uz, racked with bodily pains and irritated by the ill-spoken words of well-meaning friends, planting himself on the solid rock of his own conscious rectitude, and defying earth and hell to prove him guilty of wrong, and knowing that his Vindicator liveth and would come to his rescue – **that** is an inspired picture that will make every innocent sufferer who reads it stronger until the end of time. (Emphasis added.)

Further Reading

For a much fuller treatment of the interactions of God, Satan, and Job, and the possible advantages to be found in intense suffering, see **The Living Messages of the Books of the Old Testament**, (the chapter on the book of Job by Thomas B. Warren).

For a more complete look into the doctrine of Providence in

the Bible, the reader is referred to this author's chapter on the subject in **The Book of Romans**, the compilation of the 1983 *"Spiritual Sword Lectures."*

Chapter 35

Is It True That God Has The World In His Hands?

Goebel Music

I do not know if you have ever met Marian Anderson or not, but she is a great singer and declared by those who know her as a very great person. Over three decades ago, she made a tour around the world to take the message of good will and the friendship of the United States to the people of other lands. This great singer, great artist in music, also carried another message and one far greater in the solution of world problems. This greater message was carried in the words of a song that she sang, and which song she made popular (it also helped to make her famous). Everywhere she went she sang, *"He's Got The Whole World In His Hands."*

You know, of course, about the popularity of this song, and how it has been set to popular beat. I am told that our younger generation is more impressed with the rhythm of popular songs than with the lyrics. Perhaps with most of them, this is good. However, with this song, it is the lyrics that account for its greatness. The song states:

He's got the whole world in his hands;
He's got the little bitty baby in His hands;
He's got you and me, brother, in His hands;
He's got you and me, sister, in His hands;
He's got everybody here in His hands;
He's got the whole world in His hands.

What a message to carry to a world in which East and West were struggling to determine which would hold the

rest of the world in its hands! What a message to carry to a world of people who were striving for independence but who had forgotten they depend upon God! What a great message to carry to a world where the nation with the largest satellite in orbit or the most powerful missile with which to launch it was expected to hold the world in its hands! What a great message to carry to millions of people who were literally starving to death and who thought that God had forgotten them!

The Message Is Timeless

Although I have spoken of the lyrics of the song and its message "*for the past*," I believe the thought is one that is timeless. Was not this the message of Jesus when He said,

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father's will. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows (Matt. 10:29-30).

Jesus is saying that God has the whole world in His hands. Even the tiniest fowl of the air cannot fall to the ground without His will, and every single hair of your head is known by Him.

The Application. I am persuaded that if this is true, no death, or no change in health can escape His attention. I am convinced if this is true that no loss of happiness or injury to body or mind is beyond His knowledge. I am assured that no threat to life or to character or no desire to do wrong is too powerful for Him to overcome. No dictator, no missile, no space ship, no tariff, no injunction, no tornado, no hurricane, no satellite, no enemy of any kind can separate us from the hand and heart of God.

God has president Francois Mitterrand of France in His hand. He has president Hosni Mubarak of Egypt in His hand. He has Mikhail S. Gorbachev in His hand. He has

president George Bush in His hand. He has birth and death, soul and body, health and illness, wealth and want in His hands. He has night and day, wind and calm, flood and drought in His hands. He has the rich and the poor, the bond and the free, the male and female, the great and the small, the infants and the aged in His hands. He's got the whole world in His hands. I am thinking that we all need to be reminded of Romans 8:35-39. I ask you to listen to it carefully.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Even as it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; We were accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The Language Of Scripture. I was a student of ACC when the movie, *The Ten Commandments*, was released. Dr. Paul Southern was then the head of the Bible Department. The director of the programming for such movies called Dr. Southern, and those of us who were Bible majors had the opportunity of previewing the movie before it was ever shown publicly. I remember seeing the part where “*the finger*” of God wrote the Ten Commandments in the stone, and I thought to myself, my, if the finger of God could do that, what could the whole “*hand*” of God do?

The “*hand*” of God is not a hand like Goebel Music has, but it is an anthropomorphic, a human characteristic attributed to Deity. In the Scriptures, almost without exception, the word “*hand*” is used for a symbol of strength, power, might, and determination. I want us to listen to some passages from the Bible that say what I have been trying to say, as it says it in the most precise

and direct language.

Who among all these does not know that *the hand of the Lord* hath done this? *In his hand* is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind (Job 12:9-10).

For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods. *In his hand* are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also. The sea is his, for he made it; for *his hands* formed the dry land (Psm. 95:3-5).

In thy hand are power and might; and *in thy hand* it is to make great and to give strength to all (I Chron. 29:12).

As I have planned, so shall it be, and as I have purposed, so shall it stand,...This *is the hand* that is stretched out over all the nations ... *his hand* is stretched out and who will turn it back (Isa. 14:24-27).

The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall he shall not be utterly cast down, for the Lord upholdeth him *with his hand* (Psm. 37:23-24).

The hand of our God is for good upon all that seek him (Ezra 8:22).

The righteous and the wise and their deeds are in *the hands of God* (Eccl. 9:1).

Humble yourselves, therefore, under *the mighty hand of God* that he may exalt you in due time (I Peter 5:6; all of these emphases are mine, GM).

After giving what I have thus far, if you are average (normal) you perhaps are saying, “*My, that sure is interesting about Marian Anderson, the message that was for ‘the world then,’ and it is thrilling to know about what Jesus said and all those verses on ‘the hand’ of God, but what does that have to do with me?*” “*What*

does it mean?" "Is it something that affects me?"

Guess what? I am so glad you asked those questions, for I believe that here is something that affects our faith and helps to regulate our conduct while we make our pilgrimage upon these earthly shores. Allow me to suggest a few items as to what it means when the whole world is in the hands of God. **If it is true that God has the whole world in His hands, THEN:**

The World Belongs To God

We are very plainly told,

The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof, the world and those that dwell therein (Psm. 24:1).

We need to learn that everything belongs to God. The earth is His, it is not ours! Our friends, our relatives, our children belong to Him, and we are not at liberty to misuse or abuse anything that God has placed at our disposal. Listen to these Scriptures:

The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith Jehovah of hosts (Hag. 2:8).

For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills (Psm. 50:10).

Thine, O Jehovah, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom O Jehovah, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor come of thee, and thou rulest over all; and in thy hand is power and might; and in thy hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all. Now therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name ... for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee (I Chron. 29:11-14).

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation, neither shadow that is cast by

turning (James 1:17).

And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and soul: and not one of them said that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common (Acts 4:32).

Or know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which ye have from God? and ye are not your own; for ye were brought with a price: glorify God therefore in your body (I Cor. 6:19-20).

The world belongs to God! God has given us dominion over the material world, and over the animal world, but God has not given us the prerogative to misuse it or to destroy it selfishly. We are living at a time, when in our own land, our natural resources are being wasted. I would imagine that each of us can look back over the past twenty-four hour period and recall much we have wasted; money that we have wasted; time that we have wasted; food that we have wasted. It makes me want to shout, *"The earth is the Lord's!"*

The Indians thought the ground and its yield were sacred. When the white man began to plunder the earth, as he came into the new world, and to waste its resources, the Indians were appalled at the lack of reverence he had for the earth and its fruit. What a fool a hoarder or a materialist is! (cf. Luke 12:16-21). God has merely let us have some things to use for Him, and to take care of for Him.

Wherefore let no one glory in men. For all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's (I Cor. 3:21-23).

Here, moreover, it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful (I Cor. 4:2).

The World Is Subject To God

If it is true that the whole world is in the hands of God, then the world is subject to God. The devil might have said, *"It is better to reign in hell than to serve in heaven."* The case is that he could not reign anywhere; God reigns over the whole universe. He is the God of all; He is the Lord of all.

We are living in a time when there is a mighty struggle at the top levels of governmental authority. Men are seeking supremacy over other men and doing their utmost to have dominion over them. It is very clear from sacred Scripture that regardless of how high a man may raise himself over other men, regardless of his position, power, prestige or popularity, that man is still subject to the reign and dominion of God. If this is not the teaching of the Word, then I fail miserably to grasp it. Old Nebuchadnezzar, for instance, was the king of a great empire. There came a time in his life, after he had misused his power, that the man of God by the name of Daniel came to him and prophesied that God was going to depose him from his throne. The reason was, in the words of this man of God:

Till you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will (Dan. 4:25).

He removes kings and sets up kings (Dan. 2:21).

In the New Testament, in that great Revelation letter, we read,

They will make war on the Lamb but the Lamb will conquer them, for he is the Lord of lords and King of kings (Rev. 17:14).

Last year while in Thailand, I was startled at the way our own people spoke of the king of Thailand. I realize it was his birthday, but when I kept hearing people speak of *"the"* king, *"the king,"* and the *"king,"* I said we need to watch our language as there is but one who deserves that title! An elder rebutted and said, *"We have no problem*

here ... we are to pray for kings ... that we..." (I knew the reference, I Tim. 2:1-2, though it was not given). I said, "Yes, pray for them, as I pray for the Catholics and their priests, but I am not going to call them Father" (cf. Matt. 23:9). Then I reminded all present of the statement by Paul:

I charge them in the sight of God, who giveth life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed the good confession; that thou keep the commandment, without spot, without reproach, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ: which in its own times he shall show, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords. (I told them how the ASV reads in the footnote: "*Them that reign as kings ... them that rule as lords*" I Tim. 6:13-15, GM).

It is no wonder that Peter, on the day of Pentecost said what he did in Acts 2:36, as, indeed, he is both Lord and Christ!

I think we need to keep in mind such verses as Exodus 22:28; Ecclesiastes 10:20; Acts 23:4, when we talk about various governments of today and perhaps have a better respect for such. But I need just here to make us think in this realm. Brethren, can we sensibly subject ourselves to any other authority? Can we soberly fret over governors, kings, rulers, and dictators? God sets them up and God removes them, and they are all subject to Him. Our prime business is to go about this world of ours (or His) telling people of the King of those who reign as kings and the Lord of those who rule as lords! Indeed, we need to pray "*for*" them (cf. I Tim. 2:1-2), but we need to understand they would have "*no power, authority*" if it were not given to them by God, "*from above*" (cf. John 19:11). It is still true today that Jesus has "*all authority*" both in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18).

The World Is Ordered By God

If it is true that God has the whole world in His hands, then it is the case that the world is ordered by God. With the thinking I hear expressed today, I am sure that most of us would agree Joseph, when in that blackened pit, might have thought, *“This is just my luck.”* Or, as he was sold to the Midianites into slavery in Egypt, he might have uttered, *“Why does this have to happen to me?”* Or, again, when his friends turned against him while he was in Egypt and forgot him in prison, he might have said, *“I do not know what I have done to deserve this.”*

However, Joseph had an attitude that we need so much to have in our world today. His was one of triumphant faith in God. When his brethren finally came to Egypt and were identified to him and when he was reunited with them, he said,

So it was not you who sent me here, but God ... you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good (Gen. 45:8; 50:20).

His life was ordered by God. God used Joseph to accomplish a great purpose (it reminds me somewhat of Jeremiah 1:4-8). Joseph may not have understood the *“why”* of the pit, being a slave or in prison, but one thing he did understand and that was that God was working out all things for his good and also for God’s own glory.

I said this on one occasion and was told, *“Yea, but that was in the Old Testament.”* I do not want to get into brother Connally’s topic, but my reply to the above was that Romans 8:28 was a blessed promise and that was in the New Testament. Brethren, we need to remember the four laws found in that verse:

1. **The law of operation** — all things work.
2. **The law of cooperation** — all things work together.
3. **The law of compensation** — all things work together for good.
4. **The law of limitation** — all things work to-

gether for good to them that love the Lord.

When Paul got back from his first missionary trip, he did not go to Antioch and say, *“Let me tell you about the beatings I received from those wicked Jews”* or, *“Let me tell you of that wicked sorcerer over on the island of Cyprus and his efforts to deter our efforts.”* In words clear and simple, when Paul came to Antioch he *“rehearsed all things God had done with them”* (cf. Acts 14:27).

To the victorious, triumphant Christian who lives by faith, I want to ask, *“Is there anything outside the providential care of God?”* Does not God have **in His hands** every single event, that is, nothing is left to luck, or to fate, but all things will be molded together into a common purpose in harmony with God’s will and God’s purpose. Yea, it disturbs me to no end to hear some of my brethren sing, *“What will be, will be!”*

There are manifold verses we need to commit to memory and let them rule our hearts and help us to mold our lives (I Peter 5:5-7; Rom. 8:31; Phil. 4:4-13; Prov. 3:”5-6; 16:3; Psm. 37:3-5). Indeed, hearts need to bear in reality what our coins say in fact — *“In God We Trust!”* While recovering from a wreck in the hospital, I constantly heard, *“good luck,”* and *“don’t worry.”* Finally, I was *“full to the brim”* and said, *“I do not believe in luck”* and *“I do not worry.”* Luck means chance, wheel of fortune, the fickle finger of fate, how the cookie crumbles, amulet, rabbit’s foot, fetish, voodoo, etc., and I never did think for a person to carry around a *“rabbit’s foot”* that it must have been *“too lucky”* for the rabbit! These are two words that I wish we could knock right out of the Christian’s vocabulary. Surely we all believe our world is not run by fate or just by chance. Our world is ordered by God.

The World Is Controlled By God

If it is true that God has the whole world in His hands, it is also the case that the world is controlled by

God. I wonder, is this not the reason that we pray to God. Is God not in control of the universe. If so, then can't He do something about it? In the Old Testament, in Exodus 3:7, God said he had "*seen,*" "*heard,*" and "*knew*" of the affliction, the cry and the sorrows of His people in Egypt. In the New Testament, there is a passage that I call "*my power unlimited*" Scripture and in it Paul says, "*Yes, and God can do something about it*" (speaking of seeing, hearing and knowing, I added that thought). Paul said,

Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us (Eph. 3:20).

This verse contains so many great thoughts that it about blows my mind. It speaks in the terms that thrills our being when it says:

God,

God is,

God is able,

God is able to do,

God is able to do exceeding,

God is able to do exceeding abundantly,

God is able to do exceeding abundantly above,

above all we can ask and above all we can think, and that according to the power that worketh in us! Indeed, we pray because God can change the course of events (and I mean nothing miraculous about that statement, either) (James 5:13-15). God does uphold the world (Heb. 1:3).

Not only this, but God is in complete control of my life and of your life. Note these verses:

There hath no temptation taken you but such as man can bear: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation make also the way of escape, that we may be able to endure it (I Cor. 10:13).

Count it all joy, my brethren, when ye fall into manifold temptations; knowing that the proving of your faith worketh patience. And let patience have

its perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, lacking in nothing (James 1:2-4; cf. Rom. 5:3-5).

Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempteth no man: but each man is tempted, when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed. Then the lust, when it hath conceived, beareth sin; and the sin, when it is fullgrown, bringeth forth death (James 1:13-15).

Is any among you suffering? let him pray. Is any cheerful? let him sing praise. Is any among you sick? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith shall save him that is sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, it shall be forgiven him (James 5:13-15).

The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment unto the day of judgment (II Peter 2:9).

I am convinced we need to think on these Scriptures (and on many others). God will not let you be tempted beyond your strength! Satan is in his hand and God will not let Satan rise up against you and slay you with a power that is beyond your control. God will, with the temptation, provide the way of escape that we may be able to endure it. Think on that for a moment! Yes, when God has the entire world in his hands, even Satan himself cannot go beyond the limits of God, that is, of those God has placed on him (Prov. 16:7; Heb. 2:14-15). May we never forget that God is in control of the entire world! Something is mighty wrong when a Christian lives beside one who is a non-Christian and when some “*dark cloud*” hovers over us the Christian is as “*worried*” as is the non-Christian! In this case, who is the greater fool, the man who says there is “*no God,*” or the man who has placed his trust in God by his obedience to the divine will, then he prays for ... and then he “*worries*” about that

which he prayed for and asked help about? I can tell you immediately who it is! Oh, how we need to live like we pray and realize *“he is with us all the way”* (Matt. 28:20).

The World Is Saved By God

If it is true that God has the whole world in His hands, then it necessarily follows that the world is saved by God. Remember that statement made in the book of Acts about those faithful children of God who had been scattered from Jerusalem by persecution as revealed by Luke (Acts 8:4). They had gone over to North Africa and over to the island of Cyprus. Some of them had gone from Cyprus to Antioch and had preached there (Acts 11:19). We are told that when they came to Antioch they spoke to the Gentiles the Lord Jesus. Then we read,

And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number that believed turned to the Lord (Acts 11:21).

The conversion of the world, which we are (that is, the church of the living God) to accomplish, will not be the work of our hands. I do not want to be misunderstood on this point, as I, like all of you realize that God works through human instrumentality (II Cor. 4:7). The conversion of the world is going to be by the hand of God as He moves, directs, empowers and guides us through His word. Take note of these Scriptures:

For as the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, and giveth seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so shall my word be that goeth forth from my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it (Isa. 55:10-11).

No man can come to me, except the Father that sent me draw him: and I will raise him up in the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall all be

taught of God. Every one that hath heard from the Father, and hath learned, cometh unto me (John 6:44-45; 14:6).

For when one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not men? What then is Apollos? and what is Paul? Ministers through whom ye believed; and each as the Lord gave to him, I planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one; but each shall receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow-workers: ye are God's husbandry, God's building (I Cor. 3:4-9).

The same hand that led Israel out of Egyptian bondage and across the Red Sea, the same hand that brought them into the land of Canaan and drove out their enemies before them, the same hand that won victories for David, inspired the prophets and raised up the enemies to punish Israel, is the hand that guides the church and empowers it and leads it into fields of opportunity. If I failed to believe this, although I know God works through His word, I'd just as soon believe in some theory that disposes God from His throne.

When I preach the gospel to someone, I never think that it is through my power when they respond to the Word in their obedience, but it is rather through the power of the living God as the sword does its work upon the heart of that person (Heb. 4:12-13; Eph. 6:17). We, therefore, are instruments in the hand of God and the world is saved by God's power (I Cor. 4:15; Rom. 1:16; I Tim. 3:14-15; Acts 11:14; etc.).

I had a person to ask me on one occasion, *"Do you expect a response every time you preach?"* My answer was a firm statement in the affirmative. Brethren, we are dealing with a living God, and the power of His breath (Psm. 33:6,9; Gen. 1:3-27) by which He made the world is the same power (II Tim. 3:16-17) that is in the living Word (Heb. 4:12-13) and, indeed, it is power (I Cor. 1:18-

23). May we never minimize the Word of God nor look to some other source for our Power! This is (has been and I suppose will be) the mistake that so many have made and it is the heart and tragedy of denominationalism!

Conclusion

This is the message that is the answer to so many of our problems that are today facing our world. We need to declare to all of those who are too cynical to see the opportunities in the world to preach effectively, to those who fear the future, to those who are beset by tragedy, disappointment and heartache, to those who are demi-gods and bigots, and who try to lord it over their fellowmen, and to those who have to live under such tyranny, and emphatically state, *“God has the whole world in His hands.”*

The recognition that the whole world is in the hands of God, the realization that our duty is plainly and simply to respect and submit ourselves to that authority, is the essence of being what Almighty God wants us to be and do. Before Jesus left the earth, after being on it forty days after His resurrection (Acts 1:3), He stated to the apostles,

All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, immersing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world (Matt. 28:18-20).

Basically, this is what it means to become a Christian. It simply means, as our song says, *“Have thine own way Lord, have thine own way.”* Indeed, mold me, make me, use me, ye, have thine own way with me.

If you believe that God has the whole world in His hands and you know your life is being lived outside of His care, His protection, His wisdom, His authority, His providence, then you need this lesson. We repeat for emphasis that all authority, all power and all wisdom, all

love and all control on this earth belong to His Majesty, are in His hands. We each need to yield to His authority as has been demonstrated through the Blessed Son, Jesus Christ. The whole world is in His hands and they are “*open unto us*” (Rev. 3:20) and they will guide us into eternal life as we obey His Word. However, I do want you to know that I would be less than honest if I did not remind you of this passage:

For we know him that said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing *to fall into the hands of the living God* (Heb. 10:30-31, emp. GM).

Unless we “*take his hand*” as our strength, our stay and our guide, we will fall into the terrible punishment that His hands will inflict upon the disobedient.

What Does Romans 8:28 Teach In Regard To The Providence Of God?

Andrew M. Connally

Introduction

It is doubtful that there are fifteen other words in the Bible that say more about the providence of God than these found in Romans eight, twenty-eight.

This lectureship was first envisioned by brother Warren, brother Deaver and myself in 1961, as we journeyed from Newbern, Tennessee, where brother Woods had just debated and defeated brother Roy Cogdill on Church Cooperation. Perhaps God saw we were not ready at that time for this lectureship, so it must have been providentially hindered until this time!

Being a missionary I have found they strongly believe in the providence of God. They are often far from home, with few friends, brethren or help of any kind save that which God supplies. Therefore, they come to rely on God for more than when home surrounded by those we often can lean upon. I well remember our last tour making a tape to our elders back here at home and saying, *"I am almost afraid to pray and ask, for God answers with such rapidity it is frightening."* I meant that. I thought I saw God work providentially and quickly in our lives opening doors so the work of the Kingdom could go forward.

Many, many times now I put matters in God's hands

to handle providentially when I am unsure as to what to do, or how to do it. This is a far cry from believing that God works supernaturally (i.e. miraculously) in my life or yours. This I categorically and emphatically deny. For the Bible shows conclusively miracles have ceased, but knowing this and admitting this in no way denies the providential working of God in our lives today. In fact it enhances this knowledge and makes it all the more meaningful.

Tonight I wish to present the four laws of providence that are found in Romans 8:28.

And we know that to them that love God all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to his purpose.

The Law Of Operation

First there is the **law of operation**. "*All things work...*" If there is anything taught in the word of God it is "*All things work...*"

God has been busy in physical creation, notice:

By faith we understand that the worlds have been framed by the word of God, so that what is seen hath not been made out of things which appear (Heb. 11:3).

The worlds have been framed by the word of God. God spoke the worlds into being by *instantaneous creation!* God spoke and it was so! Some eight times it is recorded, "*God said,*" and it was so! When God speaks the law of operation, *operates!* It *works!*

Once again when Jehovah delivered the Israelites from Pharaoh the law of operation worked, notice:

And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and Jehovah caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all the night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right

hand, and on their left. And the Egyptians pursued, and went in after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. And it came to pass in the morning watch, that Jehovah looked forth upon the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of cloud, and discomfited the host of the Egyptians. And he took off their chariot wheels, and they drove them heavily; so that the Egyptians said, Let us flee from the face of Israel; for Jehovah fighteth for them against the Egyptians.

And Jehovah saith unto Moses, Stretch out thy hand over the sea, that the waters may come against upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen. And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its strength when the morning appeared; and the Egyptians fled against it; and Jehovah overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. And the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, even all the host of Pharaoh that went in after them into the sea; there remained not so much as one of them. But the children of Israel walked upon dry land in the midst of the sea; and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left. Thus Jehovah saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the seashore. And Israel saw the great work which Jehovah did upon the Egyptians, and the people feared Jehovah: and they believed in Jehovah, and in his servant Moses.

The passage says, "*And Israel saw the great **work** which Jehovah did upon the Egyptians, and the **people** feared Jehovah: and they believed in Jehovah, and in His servant Moses.*" When the laws of God operate men would do well to "*fear*" and "*believe*" today! But what do we find? Skepticism, unbelief and even ridicule and denouncement! For shame!

But secondly, the law of operation works in the spiritual realm as well. Paul argues this in Ephesians 1:11-12,

In whom also we were made a heritage, having been foreordained according to the purpose of him who

worketh all things after the counsel of his will; to the end that we should be unto the praise of his glory, we who had before hoped in Christ (Eph. 1:11-12).

And again, in verse 19,

And what the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to that working of the strength of his might (Eph. 1:19).

Then again in Ephesians 3:20,

Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us (Eph. 3:20).

It is abundantly clear the spiritual blessings found in Jesus Christ for us are according to God's counsel and in *working* through His glory. God *works* mightily in us. Notice also Philippians 4:13, "*I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me.*" God works in us. God strengthens us. What a glorious concept! The law of operation works!

The Law Of Cooperation

Secondly, there is the **law of cooperation** found in Romans 8:28: "*All things work **together**...*" There is no contradiction or conflict in what God does – "*All things work **together**.*"

Paul makes the statement in Philippians 2:13, "*but it is God who worketh in you, both to will and work for His good pleasure.*" God is the Supreme Architect of the Universe both physically and spiritually, so everything God does has a divine harmony about it. When all is of God there is no schism or division in anything that God does. God is *not* the author of confusion (I Cor. 14:33). There are no contradictions in the laws of God and no confusion in His plans. He does all things decently and in order (I Cor. 14:40).

When God created the universe He did so through

Christ and there was complete cooperation on the part of Deity. Notice Genesis 1:1 and John 1:1:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

That same Deity upholds or sustains all things in their respective place,

God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath spoken unto us in his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the worlds; who being the effulgence of his glory, and the very image of his substance, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had made purification of sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high (Heb. 1:1-3).

God worked in Christ creating the worlds and now sustaining the world. God spoke through the prophets to the ancient world and now God speaks to our world through the Christ, the Savior of the same world.

God works through man to care for and save the present world. There is a harmony and cooperation that is beautiful to behold. Notice the Great Commission:

And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned (Mark 16:15-16).

Now it is evident God is its author, man is its deliverer. God authorizes and man carries it out. Paul further enhances this idea in Philippians 2:13-16a.

For it is God who worketh in you both to will and to work, for his good pleasure. Do all things without murmurings and questionings: that ye may become blameless and harmless, children of God without

blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom ye are the light of the world, holding forth the word of life (Phil. 2:13-16a)

God is the author of the light but you and I, together with Him, hold it forth to a world that sits in darkness, cooperation is the keyword.

The same is true of our benevolence and care for others. We minister through the strength which God supplies. That which God's benevolence supplies becomes that with which we can supply to others. Our care for the poor, the widow and the orphan is God working through us to meet their needs. The only hands God has are ours, the only money He can command is ours and the only hope they have is us and we do it because we are His! **Cooperation!** That's the name of the game.

The Law Of Compensation

Thirdly, there is the **law of compensation**. "*All things work together for good...*" This is perhaps the most interesting, yet hardest to accept and believe. "*Do all things really work for our good?*" How could every situation in life really be overruled for our good? Even suffering? Pain? Persecution? Failure? Economic reverses? Even the cruelties of life? How can this be?

Paul said in I Corinthians 16:9, "*for a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries.*" This is usually the way of life, "*doors open*" and they "*effectually open,*" but there are many adversaries. God opens the doors of opportunity (Acts 14:27).

And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all things that God had done with them, and that he had opened a door of faith unto the Gentiles (Acts 14:27).

Yet, always, wherever Paul went the adversaries followed! In fact, it seems they sometimes beat them there! God opens these doors providentially, so all may hear. It has long been a firm conviction of mine based upon

a study of the entire Bible that wherever there is an honest person seeking the truth God will providentially provide for someone to get there to give him the chance to obey the gospel. God opens the doors and none can shut, God shuts the doors and none can open (Rev. 3:7). So we must take every advantage for Christ, and pray continually for God to open more doors! I am confident we are *not* waiting on Him, but rather He is waiting on us. When our faith and vision are sufficiently strong **the doors will open!**

Paul again states,

There hath no temptation taken you but such as man can bear: but God is faithful who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation make also the way of escape, that ye may be able to endure it (I Cor. 10:13).

Temptation can be an awesome thing in our lives. Often it sways our entire destiny, it troubles our days and affords us sleepless nights. Often it is like a living thing in our lives goading us, leading us to go and do things our conscience forbids. Yet, God has fully assured us that *“no temptation has taken us, but such as man can bear!”* God will provide the way of escape. Now, neighbor, the question comes, *“do you want to take it?”* or had you rather say, *“Get thee behind me Satan and push!”* In **every** situation of temptation we can profit spiritually if only we let God have control and we take the way of escape. So we can say all temptation can work for our good! In fact, *“All things”* can work for that same good.

But what about all the other situations of life, tragedy, horror, physical impairment and even death itself. Neighbor, Satan can't conceive of a situation that the power and Spirit of God cannot conquer. No situation can exist that God cannot providentially overrule for our good. Consider:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or

nakedness, or peril, or sword? Even as it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long: We were accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:35-39).

So it **is** true, God overrules everything providentially. He overrules the Kings of the earth (Rev. 1:5), their Kingdoms and the opportunities in them. He providentially guides, guards and keeps us in every situation of life.

A Case In Point

When we went to Tanzania, East Africa in 1962 to build Chimala Mission and Hospital our plans had been made to return to Malawi, Central Africa to begin a preacher training school. Our brethren in Tanzania had gone in as farmers and they were doing religious work, preaching and training preachers. The government knew they were there illegally. When the British handed the country over to the Africans, the African government told our brethren, either secure church recognition for your religious work or get out! The brethren contacted me to do something to gain this church recognition, offer some social service to gain the recognition, a medical dispensary or orphanage or something.

When we finally got there and viewed the situation it was evident that a small dispensary would never suffice. What was needed was a full-blown hospital. No hospital had ever been built by our brethren anywhere in the world! It was right in the middle of the anti-cooperation controversy which denied the right of one congregation to send funds to a sister congregation to do a job which was bigger than one church could do, to which both were equally related. There seemed to be insurmountable obstacles on every side, save one:

never underestimate the power of God working providentially in any situation. We went to work and in two and one half years the hospital was built. But, what of the church's recognition? No one had guaranteed such recognition just because we were working to build a hospital!

We went to the Minister of Interiors' office for he had power to grant the recognition or deny it. He made us wait two days in the muggy heat of a tropical December sitting in the capital city of Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, before even seeing us to allow me to plead our case. He greeted us with the words he was a Roman Catholic and Tanzania had too many religions already. During the interview he reprimanded some missionaries for baptizing Muslim children without parental consent. He found fault with numerous things being done and demanded changes to be made which we graciously agreed to do. Then he let me speak. For weeks we had prayed about this interview. We had talked to God constantly in the past 48 hours as we sat and waited to get inside. At night prayer meetings were held to plead with God to open **that door**. And while I pled with Mr. Job Lunsindi, the Minister of Interior, I prayed. I prayed for wisdom to say the right thing. I prayed for God to open this man's heart so he would grant our needs. And I prayed for the gospel to be able to enter to reach the lost. God heard our prayers, God granted our dreams. Mr. Musindi granted the church's recognition and notified the Government Gazette before we left the office! The church of Christ is legal in Tanzania. Missionaries may enter, the gospel is guaranteed the rights of their constitution, people can obey the gospel.

After twenty-seven years the Hospital still stands and work is still being done to save the lost and the church recognition still prevails. Not only so, but no other religious group has received recognition since that time. Those previously recognized are still there but no new ones have come. The providence of God surely

prevailed and continues to do so. I could give others but this is one I love.

The Law Of Limitation

The **law of limitation** works, for *“All things work together for good to them that **love the Lord..**”* God never promised to overrule providentially those who do not love God! God is not at the beckon call of those who ask without loving God. God is not a *“lakey boy”* to be abused.

The idea of loving God is one misused and abused concept. Many feel to *“love God”* is little more than having a sentimental feeling toward a Supreme Being. The Bible idea of loving God is a conscious decision to accept God’s truth and obey Him in all things possible, for Jesus said, *“if you love me you will keep my **commandments**”* (John 14:15).

At least three things are always involved in obeying God.

First there is the sacrifice. Jesus said,

If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever would save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it (Luke 9:23-24).

So many today want to live for God, but they want a life free of sacrifice and commitment. It is not possible. Jesus’ example is one of sacrifice and dedication and He demands it of every disciple. If you are not willing to pay the price then you can’t expect to collect the reward!

Secondly, there is the striving. Jesus taught, *“**Strive ye to enter in by the narrow door**”* (Luke 13:24). To strive means to *“agonize.”* To *“strive with strenuous zeal,”* to accomplish your goal. The reason so many continue to live in sin is because they are unwilling to repent, for repentance often demands *“agonizing.”* To agonize is to face reality, judgment and heaven and hell and it is

awesome. To bring one's mind, will and desire into subjection to God can often be a terrifying experience. When our Lord wrestled with His humanity in the garden, the record says, "*He being in an agony still ... and His sweat became as great drops of blood ...*" (Luke 22:44). This is a sobering, revealing insight into the agony we often must suffer to accomplish the will of God in our lives. Neighbor, how long has it been since you agonized over anything – well then, that just might be too long!

Thirdly, obedience demands we serve. Jesus said,

He that would be greatest among you shall be your servant (Matt. 23:11).

Jesus was in our midst as one who served. We are taught of God to serve one another. It is performed out of love and appreciation for Him who served us so grandly, graciously and gloriously. Whether it be the menial tasks of every day life or the greater service of teaching the Word of God to those who sit in darkness – it **is** service. Service to God and to man, this is a mark of discipleship. It cannot be ignored or neglected for God commands,

Love not in word neither with the tongue; but in deed and truth (I John 3:18).

Another Case In Point

On March the third, nineteen hundred fifty-nine the little nation of Nyasaland, Africa blew apart in civil war. My wife and I had been there some two years on our first missionaries for the Lord to establish the church in Rumpi District of the Northern Province. We lived in the Henga Valley surrounded by thirty five thousand Africans. All bridges were destroyed, the telegraph lines were destroyed and all airports were closed. We were isolated, alone and very conscious of the danger to our lives and the lives of the Africans we had converted. Claudene was expecting our first child. The mission was just being built, the congregations were small and our

strength was limited, but we clung to God with all our being. Our prayers and devotionals were frequent and fervent. We wanted to live, to work and to establish the Kingdom of God in that Valley. For nine months we were cut off and a state of siege existed. We waited, we worked and we prayed. Our African evangelists were beaten. Our church building was burned. Mobs surrounded us and we were vastly out-numbered, but we believed in the providence of God. We knew God had cared for Joseph in Egypt, Esther in Persia, and we believed He would care for us in Africa! And He did. Without the loss of one, without our hand being raised against any man, we stood by the power of God. We baptized more people in that nine months than any other time, over 400 obeyed the Lord. The church went forward for persecution paved the way for proclamation and opposition opened the doors of opportunity. God was glorified.

In Conclusion

We have looked at another facet of the great gem of providence. We have noticed the four laws of Romans 8:28: The law of **Operation**; The law of **Cooperation**; The law of **Compensation**; and fourthly, the Law of **Limitation**. We believe strongly in God's divine providence while rejecting the miraculous or the direct intervention theory. God does all things well and God cares for His own. Unto Him be the glory forever and forever. Amen!