

# **Providence of God**

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## Lesson 1 - What is Providence?

### Providence Defined

The word “providence” often occurs in our speech. We say of some incident, “it was an act of providence”; or of some failure to respond to duty, “I was providentially hindered”. But what is Providence?

Our English word “providence” is from the Latin *providencia*, and the word provide comes from the Latin *providire*. The word means *pro*: before, and *videre*: to see, or to see before. The word expresses forethought, and foresight, and conveys the idea of provident care.

The one time the word “providence” occurs in our English New Testament, applies to a man and not God (Acts 24:21), yet the idea of God’s forethought, and foresight in making provision for man’s need, and his ability to hear and answer man’s prayers runs through both testaments.

Two parallel Greek words expressed the same idea: the verb *pronoō*, which occurs three times the New Testament, means to have regard for and is translated “take thought” twice (Romans 12:17; 2 Corinthians 8:21) and “provide” (1 Timothy 5:8). The noun, *pronoia*, occurs twice and expresses the idea of forethought, foresight, care, provision for something. It is translated “providence” (Acts 24:2) and “make provision” (Romans 13:14).

*From the Bible, give at least three examples of God’s providence.*

### Four Truths Concerning Providence

God’s infinite attributes and power are clearly seen in creation. (Gen. 1:1-31) The creation account also reveals an intelligent designer who created the universe with intent and purpose. Read Revelation 4:11; John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:15-17 and discuss. However, God was not through. He now, by his providence, governs the universe by “laws of nature”. (Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 1:1-3)

Consider these four truths relative to God’s providence: 1) man under the natural order is subject to all natural laws and consequences: blessings, accidents, suffering, and death, 2) the natural order is adapted to the moral and Spiritual training of free beings. (James 1:3-5; 1 Peter 1:5,6), 3) God has the power of guiding free beings from above their freedom without interfering with it; this includes nations and individuals, 4) if he wills, God can directly alter the course of events in answer to human prayer or without it. *An Outline of Christian Theology*, pp. 148-152

God's foresight and forethought implies a definite purpose in the creation, and providence involves a practical arrangement by which the purpose is achieved. *In your own words, what is God's purpose for his creation?*

### **Alternatives to Providence**

In light of the above thoughts, consider these alternatives to providence. Discuss the possible pros (if any) and cons of each view.

#### **Indeterminism (chance):**

##### **Self-determinism:**

- Humanism
- Occultism
- Deism

##### **Determinism:**

- Fate
- Astrology
- Marxism
- Karma
- Islam
- Absolute Foreordination

As we continue our studies, hopefully we will be impressed with the uniqueness and comfort of the Bible doctrine of providence.

## **Lesson 2 - General Providence**

### **What Do We Mean General Providence?**

By general providence we mean God's regular and uniform way of acting in nature. This study includes the unvarying works of God is preserving the universe and directing its natural processes according to the predictable patterns we call the laws of nature. The consideration to special providence or how God may produce a variation in the natural order will be reserved for future studies.

*Consider Acts 17:24-28 and Matthew 5:45. What do we learn about God and his provision for mankind?*

### **God's Preservation of Nature**

*According to Genesis 2:1,2 what did God do? Does this mean God is no longer active? Look at Colossians 1:17 (key words: "hold together" ESV); and Hebrews 1:3 ("upholds the universe" ESV).*

God's Control of Celestial Bodies : Job 38:12,31-33; Psalm 104:19,20

God's Controls the Ocean: Job 38:16. How deep are the "depths" (2 Samuel 22:16)? Job reveal these "springs" are a constant source of water.

God Controls Animals: Job 39:1,5,19,20,26,27-30

God Controls the Supply of Food and Water:Matthew 6:26; Psalm 104:10-15; 24-28

God Controls the Weather:Job 36:27-29; Job 37:2-6. Note: all of the processes are attributed to God: rain, thunder, wind, clouds, snow, hail, and ice.

### **Facts About God's Relationship With the Natural Processes**

- # 1 - This is general, not special providence. (Matthew 5:45)
- # 2 - These processes are the work of God. What was God's message of Job? (Job. 37:14) or his message to Israel? (Isaiah 40:12-14; 18-20)
- # 3 - God has complete knowledge of these things. (Psalm 147:4; Psalm 50:11; Matthew 10:29,30)

# 4 - There is intimacy between God and his creation. (Psalm 104: 2,3,27,28,31-34) "He is the God of the small. He is the God of the mite, the morsel, the mote and the molecule; He is the God of the particle and the pittance. To him is significant, and there is no secrets". *God, the Ruler*; Jack Cottrell

### **General Providence and Human Beings**

# 1- Our bodies and spirits are preserved by God: (Psalm 104:14; Psalm 139:13,14)

# 2 - His activity embraces free will: (Psalm 8:3-8; Proverbs 18:9; Ecclesiastes 3:12,13)

# 3 - God's care should fill our hearts with awe and praise. (Psalm 135:5,6)

*Has God's creation touched your heart? How do you feel about him? Would you share your experience with the class?*

### **This Is My Fathers' World**

This is my Father's world, and to my listening ears  
All nature sings, and round me, rings the music of the spheres  
This is my Father's world! I rest me in the thought  
Of rocks and trees, of skies and seas -his hand the wonders wrought.

This is my Father's world - the birds their carols raise;  
The morning light, the lily white, declare their Maker's praise.  
This is my Father's world! He shines, in all that's fair;  
In the rustling grass, I hear him pass - he speaks to me every where.

Maltbie D. Babcock

## Lesson 3 - Special Providence: Christ, the Focal Point

### Introduction

*The LORD has established His throne in heaven, And His kingdom rules over all.* (Psalms 103:19) The Bible clearly teaches God rules over all nature, history, and human decisions. How? We believe by special providence.

By special providence we mean God's direct intervention into the regular order of things in order to produce a variation that would not have occurred otherwise but does not violate the possibilities of natural law or freewill. Some believe there are only two forces in the world: 1) natural law, and 2) freewill of man. Could there be a third, the direct action of God? Discuss. What about miracles? (Acts 2:22). What about a non-miraculous intervention?

Consider this simple example: In Matthew 5:45 who does God care for? Now read Matthew 6:33 or Psalm 37:25. Does God treat one group partially in the later example? Can he accomplish this without violating his laws of sowing and reaping? What would be his reason for being so selective? Provide another Bible example where God was this selective?

God created the universe to manifest his glory. (Romans 11:33-36) A clear theme of the Bible is the "kingdom of God" (Psalm 103:19) The word is primarily used to refer to God's reign. It is by his dominion that God accomplishes his purpose.

### Kingship and Creation

God's lordship over the world belongs to him by the right of creation. (Psalm 24:1,2; Romans 9:20,21)

What has God chosen to do with his rule over the earth? (Genesis 1:26-28; Psalms 8:1-9). Did God take a risk? How does freewill fit here?

### Kingship and the Fall

In the garden (Genesis 2:15-17) what did God covet from Adam and Eve? What did they do instead (Genesis 3:1-24)?

Did the fall of man affect God's relationship with the earth? (Romans 8:20; Matthew 4:8-10) Remember God appointed man to be his vassal over his creation. But, man has refused to submit to God's supremacy, thus he has become a vassal of \_\_\_\_\_. (2 Peter 2:19) Thus, Satan has become the god of this world. (John 12:31; 14:30; 2 Corinthians 4:4) Did God intend for this state to remain? (Genesis 3:14,15)

## **Kingship and Redemption**

God knew of man's need for a Savior. What do the following passages teach about God's provision? (Acts 2:22-24; Acts 4:25-28; 1 Peter 1:18-20; John 12:27-32; Hebrews 2:14,15). What would Jesus do for man's rebellion against God?

One of the clearest presentations of God's predetermined plan is recorded in Ephesians. Read and discuss Ephesians 1:3-14; Ephesians 3:8-11. See also Romans 8:28-30.

Christ, the redeemer is also: \_\_\_\_\_. (Matthew 28:18; John 18:36-37) and \_\_\_\_\_. (John 20:28; Acts 10:36-43; Philippians 2:11)

## **Kingship and Consummation**

Christ's deity is firmly established by his resurrection (Romans 1:4). Some will receive Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:1-4) and some will reject (Acts 26:19-28; Acts 28:23,24) Two groups coexists (Matthew 13:24-30;37-43) until the end of the world.

But, one day God's lordship will be established miraculously by force to those who rejected him. (John 5:28.29; Matthew 25:31-46; Philippians 2:9-11) Those who received Christ in this life will be delivered. (1 Corinthians 15:22-26; 50-57)

## **Kingship and Providence**

God is ruler of all the earth and nations. (2 Kings 19:15; 1 Chronicles 29:11,12; Psalm 22:28; Psalm 47:2; Psalm 145:10-13; Psalm 2:1-12)

God is able to work out his purpose through man, even though he is not aware of it! (Acts 3:12-18). God's purpose and plans will prevail. (Daniel 2:20-23; 5:21; Isaiah 46:9,10)

We must never question God. He will work out his purpose



## **Lesson 4 - Special Providence, Individuals and Nations**

### **Introduction**

Christ is the focal point of God's kingdom purpose. Because of man's sin, God needed Christ atoning death and triumphant resurrection. Thus, Christ is the hub of history.

To prepare the world for his Son, he: 1) chose one people - Israel, 2) worked with them for several centuries until the world was ready! Old Testament history (Abraham to Mary) centers on this one theme! Jesus Christ!

Much of God's dealing with Israel was through special providence. Even a casual glance of the Old Testament overwhelms us with God's control. Remember Psalm 103:19.

### **God Rules the Nations (Psalm 22:28; Psalm 33:10)**

Sometimes by miracles and sometimes by special providence

#### Conquest of Canaan

Who gave Israel the land? Joshua 23:5-11; Nehemiah 9:24. Why? Deuteronomy 7:7-11

What kind of event did God use to defeat the Amorites? Joshua 10:1-1; Job 38:22-30; 34-38 By special providence God produced a variation in history without violating natural law.

#### Judges

Who delivered the Israelites? Nehemiah 9:26-28 (See also Nehemiah 9:30,31)

How did God deliver them from the Midianites? Judges 7:19-25

#### United Kingdom

Who defeated the Philistines for Israel David or God? 1 Samuel 23:1-5

What does David remind Solomon? 1 Chronicles 22:17-19

#### Divided Kingdom

Who divided the kingdom of Israel? How? 1 Kings 12:1-24; 2 Kings 17:13-23

Who defeated or raised up the enemies of Israel and Judah and why? 1 Kings 20:23-28; 2 Chronicles 14:9-15; 2 Chronicles 21:5-20

### Captivity

Who raised up the Assyrians against Israel and then defeated them? 2 Kings 17:1-18; 2 Kings 18:35-37; Amos 6:8-14; Isaiah 10:5-21

Who raised up the Babylonians against Judah and then defeated them? 2 Kings 24:1-6; Daniel 4:28-33; Jeremiah 29:10-14; Jeremiah 51:1,2,6

Thus, God controlled the fortunes of nations to fulfill his will.

### **God Accomplishes His Purpose Through Individuals**

“If the Lord wills”. Consider 1 Samuel 2:7; James 4:13-15

Thus, in Israel’s history consider:

- Joseph: Genesis 45:5-7; 50:17-21
- Pharaoh: Exodus 10:1,2,20
- Canaan: Joshua 11:16-20
- Kings of Israel: 1 Samuel 13:14; 2 Samuel 7:8; 1 Kings 11:11,31-35
- Rulers of other nations: Habakkuk 1:5-11; Daniel 4:30-37; Isaiah 44:24-28; 45:1-13. This was predicted over 150 years before Cyrus’ reign. Ezra 1:1-4

“God did it, God is doing it, God will do it”

Why did God do these things?

- Deuteronomy 11:13-15: conditional
- Nehemiah 2:8,18-20; 6:15,16: unconditional
- 1 Samuel 12:16-18; Haggai 1:6-11: to chastise
- Ezekiel 24:24; 25:11; 38:23: to show that Yaweh is God
- Galatians 4:4: to produce a Savior

### **Uniqueness of God’s People**

Uniqueness of Israel: Deuteronomy 4:5-26; Exodus 19:5,6; 2 Chronicles 7:14

Uniqueness of the Church: 1 Timothy 2:1,2

Was God with George Washington and the small band of soldiers at the Potomac? Did he purge this nation of slavery? Was he with American soldiers at Normandy on June 6:1941? I don’t know! But, the principle remains. God still rules. Psalm 33:10-12

## **Lesson 5- Special Providence and the Church**

### **Recap of Lessons on Providence**

General Providence: God's regular and uniform way of acting in nature.

Special Providence: God's intervention into the regular course of things in order to produce a variation that would not have occurred otherwise but does not violate the laws of nature or man's free will.

God rules the world in order to accomplish his purpose. God worked through nations and individuals to produce a Savior, specifically through the nation of Israel.

The church of Christ (Ephesians 3:8-11; 1 Peter 1:18-20; 2:4-10) is according to God's eternal purpose. Its purpose is to manifest God's wisdom, share ????by word and life the saving knowledge of God. (Ephesians 4:11-16)

### **Three Ways That God Accomplishes His Purpose**

Of course God convicts sinners and edifies his saints is by his word: Romans 10:14-17; 1 Thessalonians 2:13. But, then consider three examples

#### Opening Doors

Opportunities to teach the lost: 2 Corinthians 2:12; Colossians 4:2,3; Ephesians 6:18,19

Opportunities to edify the saints: 1 Thessalonians 2:18; 3:6-10; Romans 1:8-11; 15:30-32

#### Opening Hearts

Convicting sinners of their need for Christ. Not, by a direct operation, but by circumstances. Acts 16:14; John 16:7-15. Natural disasters, tuning a radio, preacher topic, influence. 1 Peter 2:11,12; 3:1,2; Matthew 5:16

#### Opening the Word

Helping us understand the message: James 1:5; John 7:17

### **God's Purpose For Believers**

Question: Does God pay special attention to individual believers? Is it God's purpose that his people experience total health and prosperity in this life? Or are his blessings confined to spiritual? What about Romans 8:28 and Philipians 4:13?

## Protection

Old Testament abounds in protection from enemies. Psalm 41:1,2; Psalm 121:1-8  
But, Christians are never promised protection from physical harm. Matthew 5:10-12;  
10:16-24; 2 Timothy 3:12; 1 Peter 4:12-16; Acts 4:23-29. Was there ever exceptions?  
Romans 15:30-32 (Acts 27:41-44)

What about protection from spiritual enemies? 1 John 4:4; 2 Timothy 4:18; 2 Peter 2:9;  
1 Corinthians 10:13

## Prosperity

“Every good gift comes from God”. James 1:17. So how far can this be pressed? Does  
God promise to meet every physical need? Does he promise to make his people  
materially wealthy? What does God say about the poor? How were they to be treated?  
1 Corinthians 16:1,2; 1 Timothy 6:17-19; 2 Corinthians 8:1-5; 9:8-11

What does Jesus warn against? Matthew 6:19-21; Philippians 4:11,12. Yet, what does  
he promise? Matthew 6:26-30

## Health and Healing

Can Christians claim physical healing through the atoning blood of Jesus? Isaiah  
53:4,5; Matthew 8:16,17. Is it ok to pray for physical health? 2 John 2. Are there any  
guarantees? 2 Corinthians 12:7-10; Philippians 2:25-27

What about spiritual healing? Titus 3:1-7; Romans 6:1-23

## Correction or Discipline

God has always providentially chastised his children. Proverbs 3:11,12; Hebrews  
12:5-11. This takes on many forms. In the case of Job 1) weather Job 1:19; 2) sickness  
Job 2:7; 3) results Job 33:13-20; 23-30; 42:1-6. Yet, all of this points toward  
dependence on God.

## **Summary**

We must keep in mind God’s ultimate goal and purpose. 1 Timothy 2:1-4; Matthew  
6:9,10; Matthew 13:36-43; 1 Corinthians 15:50-58

God is indeed the sovereign ruler. He is ruling in behalf of his kingdom. Let us be  
wholly lost in His cause.

## **Lesson 6 - The Problem of Suffering and Evil**

### **Introduction**

Our study begins with the premise that God is holy, wise, and good. If all that God created is good, how do we explain evil? First, we must accept the fact that man is a moral creature with the ability to choose his own actions. Second, that God put man under a law in both the physical and moral realm. Third, compliance or non-compliance to these laws bring inevitable consequences.

“Evil” may refer to what is bad physically (disease, natural disasters), or that which is morally wicked or sinful. Again, compliance or non-compliance to these laws bring inevitable consequences.

However, the primary charge against Christianity is how is it possible for bad things to happen in a universe created by a good God?

### **Six Causes of Suffering**

- 1) My sin: Genesis 2:16,17; Romans 1:18-31
- 2) Sin of others: Joshua 7:1-26; 2 Samuel 24:1-25
- 3) Satan: Acts 10:38; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10; Revelation 2:10
- 4) Time and chance: Ecclesiastes 9:11,12; Luke 13:1-5
- 5) A fallen world: Genesis 2:16,17; Genesis 3:14-19; Romans 8:18-22
- 6) The allowance of God: Job 1:12,21; 2:6,10; Genesis 50:20; James 1:2-4; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10; Romans 5:3-5

### **Inadequate Answers to Charges Against Christianity**

1) God is not omnipotent: According to skeptics there are three propositions that are said to be incompatible: 1) God is omnipotent, 2) God is benevolent, 3) evil exists. An all powerful God would not allow for evil and suffering.

2) God is not good: Again, a good God would not allow for evil and suffering.

3) God deliberately caused evil: God had a legitimate reason for creating evil. It was necessary for God to carry out his purposes for mankind.

All three of these are completely ruled out by the teaching of Scripture.

## **Bible Ways to Cope With Suffering**

### Lessons from Job

- 1) It is possible to remain righteous while suffering loss. (Job 1:21,22; 2:10)
- 2) Don't give up on God (Job 9:1-35; 10:2; 13:1-3; 16:20; 23:1-7)
- 3) Remind yourself of the things you know God to be, and hold fast to them. (Job 1:21; 19:25-29; 28:23-28)
- 4) Remember what is really important, and value those things. (Job 28:1-28)
- 5) Trust in God (not people) for strength. (Job 16:2)
- 6) Keep an eternal perspective. (Job 31:1-34)

### Great Bible Doctrines to Help Us Cope

- 1) God is personal, wise, and in control. We are not subject to a fickle God. (Isaiah 46:9-11; Psalm 90:13-17)
- 2) God suffered with us through his Son, Jesus. (Hebrews 5:7-11; 4:14-16)
- 3) Suffering reminds us of our dependence on God and can bring us closer to Him. (Romans 5:1,2; 2 Corinthians 1:3-11)
- 4) Through the gospel of grace, we have the assurance of salvation. (1 John 1:7-2:2; 5:13)
- 5) We are assured of a bodily resurrection. (Philippians 3:20,21; 1 Corinthians 15:50-58)
- 6) We are promised a New Heaven and a New Earth. (2 Peter 3:9-13)
- 6) One day, by a just God, all wrongs will be addressed, and righteousness will prevail. (Roman 2:5-11; Matthew 25:31-46; Revelation 6:9-11; 20:11-16)

## **Conclusion**

*“The only purpose of the book is to solve the intellectual problem raised by suffering; for the far higher task of teaching, fortitude and patience I was never fool enough to suppose myself qualified, nor have I anything to offer my readers except my conviction, that when pain is to be born, a little courage helps more than much knowledge, a little human sympathy, more than much courage, and the least tincture of the love of God more than all.”* (C.S. Lewis, The Problem of Pain)

*“You never know how much you really believe anything until it's truth or false. It becomes a matter of life and death to you.”* (C.S. Lewis, A Grief Observed)

## Lesson 7 - What About Predestination and Free-Will?

### Introduction

The term predestination applies to all that God purposed and predetermined to occur. There are two main aspects of predestination: 1) predestination to service, and 2) predestination to salvation.

Two related New Testament terms are: 1) “predestine” (*prooridzo*), meaning to predetermined, or decide beforehand, and 2) “to elect” (*eklegomai*), meaning to elect or choose. To “predestine” includes a time element that refers to both events as well as persons, while “elect” is limited to persons.

### Predestination to Service

#### Election of Jesus

Jesus of Nazareth is the primary character in the redemption of man from sin. He is the only one qualified to accomplish this task, because he is the only Son of God and sinless. God chose a humble Jewish maiden to bring his son into the world.

Consider the following passages:

Isaiah 42:1 (Matthew 12:18)

Luke 9:35

1 Peter 2:4,6

Acts 2:23

Acts 4:28

#### Election of Israel

Israel was the nation chosen by God to produce the Christ. (Deuteronomy 7:6, 1 Chronicles 16:13; Acts 13:17) This was an election to service, not salvation. (Romans 9:4,5)

#### Election of Individuals

God chose certain individuals to facilitate his purposes. Those individuals in connection with Israel were: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Nehemiah 9:7; Romans 9:7,13); Moses (Psalm 106:23); David (Psalm 78:70); and Gentiles rulers (Romans 9:17; Isaiah 45:1)

Christ chose his Apostles (Luke 6:13; John 6:70,71; 13:18; 15:16; Acts 10:40,41; Galatians 1:15,16). The reference to foreknowledge (Acts 2:23) is very important to understanding the story of Judas.

## Predestination to Salvation

The church of Christ is the very object of Christ's love and redemptive sacrifice (Acts 2:28; Ephesians 5:25). It is clear that the church of Christ is individuals chosen for salvation. ( 2 Thessalonians 2:13)

## Calvinism and Unconditional Election

Calvinism teaches that certain individuals are unconditionally or predestined to become believers in Christ and thus saved. These are saved, while the rest of mankind are condemned to hell forever. "...*God once established his ...unchangeable plan those whom long before determined...to receive salvation and those whom ... he would devote to destruction.*" Institutes, John Calvin

## The Bible and Election

The Bible teaches that election is based on certain conditions which anyone may meet. Are both the plan and the individuals predetermined? This is debatable.

- 1) Election is individual. See Romans 8:29,30; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; Ephesians 1:4,5. Some references focus on the elect in general, but others identify the person or specific individuals (Romans 16:13; 1 Peter 1:1,2; Revelation 17:8). Are specific individuals predestined to salvation? Yes. Their names have been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world. The relationship between foreknowledge and predestination is key to understanding this possibility. (Isaiah 46:9,10) By means of foreknowledge God determines every individual's destiny before the foundation of the world.
- 2) Election is conditional. Only those "in Christ" are thus in a saving union with God. See Ephesians 1:4: "He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world". They were in Christ before the foundation of the world.

There are conditions which one must meet in order to be "in Christ".

(Galatians 3:26,27; Ephesians 3:17; Colossians 2:11-13; 1 John 1:7)

The elect are predestined to salvation, but not to the means of salvation. Their choice of Jesus Christ is not predestined; the choice is foreknown, and the subsequent blessings of salvation are then predestined. See Romans 8:29,30.

## Sovereignty of God

Calvinist's see free will as an attack on God's sovereignty. "This makes God's choice dependent on man's choice".

Not so! (See Romans 9:20-24; 30-33) It was God's sovereign choice to bring into existence a universe inhabited by free-will creatures, and to save on the condition of faith in Christ.



## **Lesson 8 - Providence and Prayer**

### **Introduction**

According to Romans 10:1, what is prayer?

According to 1 Timothy 2:1,2, what are the forms of prayer? Try to define each term.

Prayer may responding to God is various ways. Read and discuss the following examples. What is happening in each example?

- Psalm 30:1-5:
- Psalm 66:1-4:
- Exodus 15:3-7,11:
- Job 7:11-16,19,20:
- Habakkuk 1:2-4; :17,18
- Matthew 26:39-42:

Prayer may be a request for God to respond. Read and discuss the following examples. What is happening in each example?

- 2 Kings 20:1-3:
- Exodus 32:11-13:
- Luke 23:34:
- Ezra 8:21-23:
- Acts 4:23-29:

### **Prayers Place in the Life of a Christian**

#### Prayer strengthens the Christian

What are the important lessons in the parables recorded in Luke 18:1-14?

“Be anxious for nothing, but in \_\_\_\_\_ by prayer and supplication... let your \_\_\_\_ be made known to God.” Philippians 4:6; 1 Peter 5:6,7; 1 John 1:9

Try to outline the Lord’s example prayer in Matthew 6:9-15. What important categories are included?

## **Hindrances to Prayer**

- Sin: Psalm 66:18-20; 1 John 3:22
- Self-righteousness: Luke 18:9-14
- Refusal to forgive: Matthew 6:14
- Doubts: James 1:5-7; Mark 11:20-24
- Will of God: 1 John 5:14,15; Habakkuk 3:16-18. This would include both his preceptive and purpose will.

## **Prayer Assumes Some Things About God's Nature**

God is Personal: Psalm 139:17,18, 23,24

God is Powerful: Psalm 139:13-16

God is Present: Psalm 139:1-10

God is Good: Psalm 139:17,18

## **Does Prayer Change God or Influence God?**

Read and discuss the account in Exodus 32:1-14. Does this account diminish God's nature? (Hebrews 6:17,18) If not, how?

Read and discuss the account recorded in 1 Kings 17:1; 18:1,41-46; James 5:16-18

Read and discuss the prayer request recorded in Romans 15:25-30.

## **Lesson 9 - Providence in the Life of the Christian**

### **Introduction**

We certainly see God's hand in world history, but what about God's hand in our personal life? What about you? Regarding this subject, Christians are prone to extremes: 1) no providence other than natural processes, or 2) God's hand in every minute detail.

Even those of us who believe in God's providence, find it difficult to say this or that specific event was an act of providence. Do you see God's hand in your life?

Consider two places of Scripture to consider: 1) Ecclesiastes, 2) Matthew 6.

### **Ecclesiastes**

#### The Preacher's View of Life Under The Sun

Some find pessimism in this book: that is nothing seems to be right. Certainly the sole pursuit of earthly things is "vain and like striving after the wind". However, "God" is used forty times in the text, implying his hand in earthly events which should produce optimism.

While life "under the sun" is transitory and fleeting, God's hand is still in the world controlling events for his own good.

#### The Search (Ecclesiastes 1,2)

Early in the book two questions are raised. See Ecclesiastes 1:3 and 2:3. To what things "under the sun" does Solomon turn to find fulfillment and meaning? After his search what is his conclusion? See Ecclesiastes 2:11.

#### Time, Purpose, and Controlling Providence (Ecclesiastes 3-9)

The wise man proceeds by introducing a situation in the realm of creation that demands our recognition of providence. See Ecclesiastes 3:1-21. From this section we learn the following: 1) man lives under the times and seasons appointed by God (vs. 1,9-11); 2) that God put "eternity" in our hearts - must be more than life "under the sun" (vs. 11); 3) man's job is to enjoy the fruit of his labor- this is God's gift (vs. 12,13 see also 9:9,10); 4) Since we cannot alter God's plans, man must learn to "fear before him" (vs. 14); 5) Finally, there is the existence of evil, and ultimately God will judge the righteous and the wicked. (Vs. 16-22).

Furthermore, (Ecclesiastes 7:13,14) both prosperity and adversity come in life. When prosperity comes, rejoice; when adversity comes, reflect, meditate, and learn. Man is

limited in his ability to know and fathom the mysteries of the universe. (Ecclesiastes 7:23,24; 8:16,17) Finally, all is in God's hands. (Ecclesiastes 9:1)

### Conclusions Reached (Ecclesiastes 9-12)

Death closes man's relationship to this life. (Ecclesiastes 9:4-10). Thus, 1) enjoy the present life with its blessings; 2) live joyfully with with your wife, for life is fleeting; and 3) fulfill God's law of work.

In closing: (Ecclesiastes 11:9-12:14) 1) enjoy your youth (11:9-10); 2) remember God while you are young (12:1); 3) man is moving toward the challenges of aging and death (12:2-7); 4) the final conclusion: fear God and obey him, for God will bring everything to judgment. (12:13,14)

### **Jesus and New Testament Teaching (Matthew 6:1-34)**

The word "Father" occurs 12 times in the chapter; the word "God" occurs twice. The frequent occurrence of these terms for Deity focuses attention on the Father, and his concern for his own, and further, his ability to act on their behalf.

In giving to the disciples a model for praying, the Lord taught them to ask; "Give us this day, our daily bread", that is the physical necessities of life, not spiritual. Jesus' teaching concerning anxiety in verses 25 through 34 fully establishes this view. Thus, the disciples are not to have anxious care, or to be unduly concerned about the matters of every day life, for the Lord will provide for their necessities. Worry provides none of the essentials of life; and since it is forbidden by the Lord, anxiety about these necessities of life is sin. It is a form of unbelief.

Meanwhile, God wants his disciples to focus on the matters of the kingdom. See verse 10, 13, 21, 33. God will promises to provide these necessities so we can focus on his spiritual kingdom.

### **Conclusion**

God works in the life of each individual. In creating the world and man, he made provision so to control both, that he could answer the petitions of his Saints and direct the whole to the consummating of his ultimate purpose. Let us believe in that providence and see God hand in all the affairs of life: international, national, social, religious, and individual. Such a belief will give meaning to life.