

Providence of God

- I. Introductory Definition: Providence is God's continuous action in preserving his creation and guiding it toward his intended purposes. Government means that God is actively engaged in achieving his purposes in his creation.
 - A. Two opposing ideas:
 1. Deism—God is creator but not sustainer, has no presence or involvement in the world the He created.
 2. Continuous Creation—God actually recreating universe anew each instant in time.
 - B. Questions to consider:
 - Why is providence important to a theology of God?
 - What two aspects of providence are important to Christian understanding and how are they presented in Scripture
 - What is the extent of God's governing activity?
 - What are the ways in which God relates to sin?
 - What are the major features of God's governing activity and what do they mean?
 - Why is there concern over the role of prayer?
 - How are miracles related to the providence of God?
 - C. Translation Applications
 1. KJV - The word *providence* is found only once - Acts 24:2 KJV. It is used to refer to what the governor Felix has provided.
 2. NIV – The word providence is found only once – Job 10:12. Job uses this word to illustrate God's control and will over his spirit.
 3. NKJV – The word providence is found twice – Psalm 104:1; Psalm 147:1. It is contained in the header of the psalms. It's used as a reference to God's complete control.
 4. Practical Use: When Christians use the word "providence", we speak of:
 - a. God's hand in creation
 - b. God's ultimate authority
 - c. God having a plan and carrying it out.
 - d. God's ability and faithfulness to provide.
- II. God's Providence on a Macro level
 - A. To reconcile the world, who has sinned and gone astray, to be partakers in the presence and glory of God. This is done through Christ.
 1. Colossians 1:15 – 23
 2. John 3:16
 3. 2 Corinthians 5: 18 - 19
- III. God's Providence on a Micro level: God has a plan and purpose for each individual person. All of God's individual plans work together for the greater good of the body of Christ.
 - A. Individuals
 1. Jeremiah 1:5 – Plan established before our birth.
 2. Galatians 1:15 – 16 – Paul calling into ministry "when it pleased God"
 3. Romans 12:3 – 8 - One body, different spiritual gifts, according to God's grace

4. 1 Corinthians 1:17 – Paul says that he was called to preach and not to baptize.

B. Explicit Examples of God's Providence shown in OT persons

1. Joseph – Gen 50:20
2. Moses – Pharaoh's daughter/ midwives- Exodus 2:9 – 10
3. Esther – Esther 4:14
4. Nehemiah – Nehemiah 1:11
5. Jeremiah – 1:5
6. Reheboam – 1 Kings 12:24
7. Rahab – Josh 2:9 – Deuteronomy 2:25
8. King Cyrus - defeating Babylon – Isaiah 45:1 – 3
9. Esau & Jacob – Romans 9:10 - 12

C. Explicit Examples of God's Providence shown in NT persons

1. Blind man – John 9:1-3
2. Lazarus's death – John 11:4
3. Peter: John 1:42, Mathew 16:18
4. Judas Iscariot – John 17:12, John 6:70
5. Paul – Galatians 1:15-16

IV. Two Aspects of Providence—a living assurance that God is active and present in our lives as a means of confidence that things will not happen merely by chance, but God is ultimately in control of everything.

A. Providence as Preservation (sustenance) –God's work in preserving, maintaining that which he created.

1. Nehemiah 9:6 (Creation as a whole): Thou, *even* thou, *art* LORD alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all *things* that *are* therein, the seas, and all that *is* therein, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth thee

2. Colossians 1:17 and Hebrews 1:3: (The Role of Christ in Creation):

3. Exodus 1 (God protected Israel for ultimate destruction)

4. Daniel 6:16: (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego)

5. Matthew 6:26 (Transition from birds, to flowers, to humans)

6. Matthew 10: (God's care)

7. John 10:27-30 (His children)

8. Romans 8:35 (Believers are inseparable for God's love), conclusion of the separability question (38-39)

9. 1 Corinthians 10:13 (Provision, protection and deliverance of God will enable us to endure temptation)

10. Matthew 24:15-31 (preservation in trials)

11. 1 Peter 4:12-13 (Rejoice in trials and tribulations- it allows us to be identified with Christ)

12. Philippians 4:19 (God will supply all of our needs)

13. Garden of Gethsemane –

God's intervention and not a self-sustaining inanimate

14. Psalm 104—God’s preserving hand everywhere, particular throughout nature-God set the foundations of the earth, never to be shaken (v. 5), sends the screams into the valleys (v. 10), waters on the mountains (v. 13), makes darkness so that the eco-system will be maintained (vv. 20-21), all creatures of God receive their food from him (vv. 24-30)
15. Job—God controlling the whole of creation: He sends the rain (5:10), snow (37:10)
- B. Providence as Government—God’s work of guiding and directing---purposive directing of the whole of reality and the course of history to God’s ends—the actual execution within time of his plans devised in eternity.
1. The Extent of God’s Governing Activity—God’s governing activity extends over a large variety of areas.
- a) Areas of governance
 - i. Controlling nature-the very elements obey his voice.
 - 1) Ps. 135:5-7, Matthew 5:45 (Other Examples)
 - a. Elijah—his prophecy on no rain for 3.5 years and the sending down of lightning on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:37-38)
 - b. Jesus power over nature (Mark 4:39, Luke 8:25, Matthew 6:25-30)
 - ii. God guides and directs the animal creation.
 - 1) Psalm 104:21-29---young lions, sea creatures
 - 2) 1 Kings 17:4, 6—Elijah drinking from the brook and the raven feeding him, even though animals are incapable of making conscious choices.
 - iii. God’s governance involves control over human history and destiny of nations.
 - 1) Daniel 2:21; 4:24-25—God changes times and seasons and kings and dominions.
 - 2) Isaiah 10:5-12,13—God used Assyria to accomplish his judgment on Israel than later judging them as well.
 - 3) Acts 17:26—Paul’s sermon on Mars Hill
 - 4) Job 12:23
 - 5) Ps. 47:7-8; 66:7
 - iv. God has sovereignty (supreme power and authority) over circumstances of the lives of individuals.
 - 1) Hannah—1 Sam. 2:6-7
 - 2) Mary—Luke 1:52
 - 3) Paul—Gal. 1:15-16
 - 4) Giving of Spiritual Gifts (1 Cor. 4:6-7)
 - 5) Giving of Spiritual Gifts and the Sovereignty of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 12:3-6; 1 Cor. 12:4-11)
 - 6) Sovereignty of God in David’s life (Ps. 31:14-15)
 - 7) Exalting of the righteous and the destruction of the wicked (Ps. 75:6-7, 9-10)

- v. God's sovereignty over seemingly accidents (Proverbs 16:33- even casting of lots is the Lord's decision)
 - 1) Jonah 1:7---Jonah was chosen to be casted overboard by the casting of lots.
 - 2) Acts 1:23-26---replacement of Judas with Matthias
 - 3) Exodus 21:13—accidental manslaughter is regarded as being directed by God (everything is in God's control---no room for chance)
 - 4) Esther 4:14—
 - 5) Inclusiveness of God's governing power
 - a. Ps. 103:19-22
 - b. Daniel 4:34-35
 - c. Ephesians 1:11
 - d. Old and New and the teachings of Jesus seems to suggest the universal ruling power of God. His rule is universal in terms of both time (it is eternal) and extent (everyone and everything is totally subject to it)
- vi. God's sovereignty extends to the free actions of humans.
 - 1) God promised the Israelites they would not depart from Egypt empty-handed (Exodus 3:21). This was fulfilled at the time of departure by the very people they were enslaved to (Exod. 12:35-36). They were not coerced—they did it of free will.
 - 2) Saul stopped to rest in the very same cave that David and his men were hiding (1 Sam. 24). David interpreted the incident as God's will (v. 10). Saul basically reiterated the same thing (v. 18).
 - 3) God fashioned the hearts of the inhabitants of the earth (Ps. 33:15)
 - 4) Humans plans and actions will eventuate in the fulfillment of God's purposes (Prov. 16:1; 19:21)
 - 5) Ezra refurbishing the temple, used the resources of King Artaxerxes of Persia (Ezra 7:27)
 - 6) Sinful humans—the crucifixion of Jesus (Acts 2:23), and the Lord inciting David conducting a census (2 Sam. 24:1) versus Satan induced David to commit the sin of taking a census (1 Chron. 21:1); 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12—Satan doing the work of God as well

C. The Relationship Between God's Governing Activity and Sin

- 1. God is not the cause of sin (James 1:14; I John 2:16) but he does act in relationship to it.

a) Four Aspects of Causation

- i. Material Cause---"the stuff" (Lumber, mortar, bricks etc.)
- ii. Formal Cause—immediate plans or essential properties (Blueprint)
- iii. Efficient Cause—means by which the effect takes place (tools, "cause effect")
- iv. Final Cause---purpose (*telos*, a place to stay or live)

2. Ways in which God can and does relate to sin.

- a) He can prevent it: Gen. 20:6 (Abimelech and Sarah); Ps. 19:13 (David's petition for God to keep him from sinning)
- b) He can permit it—He renders it certain that we will do the act but He does not render it necessary that we act as such: Acts 14:16 (God, in the past, let nations go their own way); Romans 1:24, 26, 28 (God giving people to their lust, improper conduct, a base mind); Matthew 19:8 (Jesus said that Moses permitted divorce because their hearts were hard); 2 Chronicles (God left Hezekiah to test him...) and Psalm 81:12-13
- c) He can direct it—while permitting some sins to occur, God nonetheless directs them in such a way that good will evolve from their actions: Gen. 37:21-22—the “law of the reversals”, (Ethelbert Stauffer). Gen. 50:20, you meant it for evil, but God meant it for good. Acts 2:36, the Romans imposed the crucifixion on Christ which God didn't intend but worked it out for good--Judo puncher.
- d) He can limit it—at times, God may not prevent evil, but He can limit or restrain the amount of evil that demons, Satan, or humans can do (Job 1:12); Ps. 124:1-3, David's proclamation to Israel “if the Lord had not been on our side. Paul advised believers that there was a limit on the level of temptation that they would be induced—even when God permits sin, he limits it.

D. The Major Features of God's Governing Activity

1. God's governing activity is universal.
2. God's providence not extended merely to his own people.
3. God is good in his government.
4. God is personally concerned about those who are his
5. Our activity and God's activity are not mutually exclusive.
6. God is sovereign in his government.
7. We need to be careful as to what we identify as God's providence—the German Christian in 1934 released a statement in support of Adolf Hitler leadership read as follows: *“We are full of thanks to God that He, as Lord of history, has given us Adolf Hitler our leader and savior from our difficult lot. We acknowledge that, with body and soul, are bound and dedicated to the German state and to its Führer. This bondage and duty contains for us, as Evangelical Christians, its deepest and most holy significance in its obedience to the command of God”.*

V. Providence and Prayer—the issue originates from the question; what prayer really accomplishes? Does prayer have a positive influence on what happens? It presumes God's plan was not perfect and needs to be adjusted. It would seem as though providence would be influenced by whether or not one prays and/or how much one prays. On the other hand, if God's plan is established and unchangeable, what is the use of prayer?

A. Two observations

1. God's word teaches that his plans are definite and not subject to revision.

Which seems to indicate, the necessity of human willingness and faith?

2. We are at the same time commanded to pray always (James 5:16) and that prayer has a value.
- B. There seems to be a partnership between God and humans, God does not if humans are not willing to play their part.
 1. Jesus was hindered from performing miracles because of a lack of faith (Mark 6:6).
 2. Any or all of the other disciples that were in the boat with people could have walked on the water but only Peter was the only one who asked (Matthew 14:22-33)
 3. The centurion brings his request for healing Matthew (8:5-13)
 4. The woman with the issue of blood (Matthew 9:18-22)
- C. When God wills something to happen, He also will a means by which is it to happen. This presupposes faith. So prayer doesn't change God's will but simply is the means by which it is accomplished which means without it, the desired end will not be realized.