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The Providence Of God

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Definition

The Providence of God refers to God's working in this world through natural laws. It should be viewed as distinct from a miracle which is God's super-natural working.

Here are some examples of the difference: (1) Mary's virgin conception (Mt. 1:23-25) and Sarah's conceiving post-menopause (cf. Gen. 18:11) are examples of miracles. Hannah's conception is an example of God's providence (1 Sam. 1:19-20). (2) Jesus' feeding the 5000 with five barley loaves and two small fish is an example of a miracle (Jn. 6). Praying for food (Mt. 6:11) and working (2 Thes. 3:10) would be trusting in God's providence. (3) The ram in the thicket (Gen. 22:13-14) is an example of God's providence. If God had made such appear out of the dust of the ground such would have been a miracle.

God's providence may be divided into two categories. (1) God's general providence for all of humanity (Mt. 5:45; Col. 1:17). (2) God's special providence in caring for His people (Mt. 6:31, 33) and answering prayer (Jam. 5:17-18; 3 Jn. 2).

There is a difficulty in identifying God's providence. Providence is of such a nature that all one can say is "perhaps", or "who knows" (Phile. 15-16; Esth. 4:14). One can never know for sure, unless God has revealed such.

Fortunately, God has revealed in scripture some of His providential involvement in the affairs of men. Let us notice

Some Examples

1. Joseph.

The record should be familiar to Bible students. Joseph saved the Israelites during a great famine (Gen. 37-50).

How is it that Joseph was able to do this? (1) Joseph was able to do this because of his high position in Egypt. (a) How did he come to this high position? Pharaoh appointed him. (b) Why did Pharaoh appoint him? He was appointed because in him was the spirit of God. (c) How did Pharaoh know the spirit of God was in him? Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dream. (d) How did Pharaoh know of Joseph? Joseph had met the Pharaoh's butler in prison. The butler was released. The butler told Pharaoh that Joseph could interpret dreams. (e) How did Joseph meet the butler? Both were in prison. Joseph

was in prison due to a false charge of attempted rape of Potiphar's wife (Potiphar was Joseph's master). Moreover, Joseph was a trustee in the prison. (f) How did Joseph come to be owned by Potiphar? Potiphar bought Joseph from some Ishmaelite traders. Thus Joseph came to Egypt. (2) Joseph was able to save his brethren, because he was in Egypt. (a) Why was he in Egypt? Some Ishmaelite traders took him to Egypt and sold him to Potiphar. (b) How did the Ishmaelite traders come to possess him? Joseph's own brothers sold him to them. (b) Why did they do this? They were jealous of him. Moreover, there were those dreams he had.

Make no mistake, God was providentially at work. Joseph credited God saying to his brothers "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, in order ... to save many people alive" (Gen. 50:20).

Brother Roy Deaver correctly said, "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 the baker, and (2) When God gave Joseph power to interpret the dreams of Pharaoh" (Power Lectures: The Providence of God, p. 123).

2. Feast Days.

"Three times in the year all your men shall appear before the Lord, The Lord God of Israel. For I will cast out the nations before you ... neither will any man covet your land when you go up to appear before the Lord your God three times in a year" (Ex. 34:23-24).

This would be the perfect occasion for an enemy nation to invade, when all the men are removed from the land on a religious pilgrimage to Jerusalem. However, consider the words of Thomas H. Horne—"It is a well known fact, that the Jews constantly attended these ceremonies without any fear of danger, and their most vigilant enemies never invaded them during the sacred season" (Wayne Jackson, A Study of the Providences of God, p. 10). Adam Clark wrote, "What a manifest proof of the power and particular providence of God. How easy would it have been for the surrounding nations to have taken possession of the whole Israelitish land, ... when there was none to protect them but women and children! (ibid).

3. Paul.

Paul desired and prayed to be able to go to Rome (Rom. 1:9-10). He did make it to Rome, years later (Acts 28:16).

What a journey he had! (1) He was taken into custody for his own good (Acts 21). (2) A plot to kill him failed (Acts 23). (3) He could have been released but, Felix's greed and politics (Acts 24), and Festus' naivety caused him to appeal to Caesar (Acts 26). He was preserved through a fierce storm (Acts 27).

God's providence was what brought him to Rome (Acts 23:11; 27:23-25). Paul was not alone in all of this. God was with him.

4. Us.

It is important for us to remember that God is in control. He has promised us His providence in meeting our earthly needs (Mt. 6:31, 33). He has assured us His providence in the spiritual realm (1 Cor. 10:13).

Though, we cannot always see the bigger picture, we should trust in him. His providence extends even to the nations (Acts 17:24-26; Dan. 4:17).

Furthermore, even seemingly bad experiences in life, He could be using for good. (1) Joseph's brothers meant evil, but God used their deeds to accomplish good (Gen. 50:20). (2) God used the injustice against Paul to bring him to Rome and provide opportunity to influence many (Phil. 1:13; 4:22). He was set in place to defend the gospel (Phil. 1:17).