



UNDERSTANDING THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

Biblical Answers for Questions We Ponder

EARL R. BORDERS

UNDERSTANDING THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

Biblical Answers for Questions We Ponder

Earl R. Borders

The Church of God, God's Acres
2019

© 2019 by Earl R. Borders

All rights reserved. This book or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the publisher except for the use of brief quotations in a book review or scholarly journal.

First Printing: 2019

ISBN 978-1-79474-190-4

This books and other books by this author can be ordered by contacting the author or:

The Church of God, God's Acres
675 N. Cedar Street
Newark, Ohio 43055
740-345-1312

www.GodsAcres.org

Printed by Lulu.com

Dedication

I lovingly dedicate this book to my children. There have been many unexpected events in their lives. Events which humanity did not expect nor desire, but for which Providence had a divine purpose.

OTHER PUBLICATIONS BY THE AUTHOR

Daniel and Revelation Texts Examined

Depression

Did Jesus Descend Into Hell?

Gifts, Offices, and the Operation of the New Testament

Church

How to Study

Identifying the Beasts of Revelation

Jude, the Acts of the Apostates, Volume 1 (Sunday School Quarterly)

Jude, the Acts of the Apostates, Volume 2 (Sunday School Quarterly)

Properly Understanding the Position of the Old Testament

Prophecy and Revelation Concerning Gog and Magog

Prophecy and Revelation Concerning Seraphims, the Way of the

Tree of Life, and Cherubims

Social Issues

Symbols – The Key to the Revelation

The Beatitudes of Christ

The Book of Revelation Explained – Volume 1

(Chapters 1-3)

The Book of Revelation Explained – Volume 2

(Chapters 4-8:2)

The Book of Revelation Explained – Volume 3

(Chapters 8-11)

The Book of Revelation Explained – Volume 4

(Chapters 12-14)

The Book of Revelation Explained – Volume 5

(Chapters 15-19)

The Devil, His Origin, His Nature and His Destiny

The Formula of Prayer

The Seven Prophetic Parables of Christ

The Truth Concerning: The Old Testament Ordinances, The New

Testament Ordinances, The Two Resurrections – Physical &

Spiritual, and The Final Judgment

"The Worshippers Once Purged"

Types in Genesis

Table of Contents

CHAPTER ONE	
What Is the Providence of God?	1
CHAPTER TWO	
Praying According to the Providential Will	5
CHAPTER THREE	
Examples of God Working	
His Providential Purpose	9
CHAPTER FOUR	
The Personal Aspect of God's Plan	13
CHAPTER FIVE	
Additional Instances of Divine Providence	16
CHAPTER SIX	
The Divine Anti-Fishes and Loaves Aspect.	22

Preface

The subject of this book, unfortunately in the realms of religion, has been the topic of much confusion, misunderstanding, and even served as the impetus for doctrines that are indeed damnable. "God is not the author of confusion" (1 Corinthians 14:33) and certainly does not desire that His people be in confusion concerning such a vital truth as the providence of God. He desires we "know the truth," so that it can enable us to be "free" (John 8:32) from erroneous and false doctrines that work against our spiritual welfare.

However, this study is not designed to present an exhaustive doctrinal treatise upon this vast and immeasurable truth. This work is being presented, rather, as a practical presentation to reveal the personal perspective of providence and its proper position in the lives of God's people. I have attempted to focalize upon this vast Biblical doctrine to this end—that it might be an enlightenment and encouragement to the saints as they sojourn through life. I trust it will address questions with which you may have grappled and provide scripturally sound answers to quell those questions. May the Lord use this writing to edify the church and to glorify God!

Yours in Christ,
Brother Earl R. Borders
Newark, Ohio
November 2019

E*phesians 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:*

4 According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

5 Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,

6 To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

7 In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;

8 Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence;

9 Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself:

10 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:

11 In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:

12 That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.

CHAPTER ONE

What Is the Providence of God?

Incorporated within this passage is a central theme: the doctrine of divine providence. As we study concerning understanding the providence of God, first, we recognize that we live in an enlightened day, a day of unparalleled revelation. The Apostle Paul penned in Romans 16:25-26: "Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation [That word in the Greek is *apokalupsis*, and it is the same word employed in Revelation 1:1. It means 'an unveiling, the taking away of the veil, a revealing of what previously has not been possible to view.'] of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, But now [the New Testament dispensation] is made manifest" We live in a day and time when God is revealing truths that have been hidden throughout the ages. As a matter of fact, they have been "kept secret *since the world began*." He is making them "manifest"; He is uncovering, unveiling, revealing them.

Under the old economy, many of these things were hidden; they were a mystery. But, now, they are being made manifest, and God has ordained a way to make truth manifest. We read in Titus 1:3, "But hath in due times manifested his word through preaching" Preaching is God's ordained avenue to reveal precious truth. This New Testament dispensation is a privileged dispensation, and we particularly who live in this period of time, the seventh-seal period of this Gospel Day, are indeed a very blessed people.

Revelation 10:7 states, "But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel [which is the days we are now living in], when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished [*The Emphatic Greek Diaglott* says 'completed']" God is completing, or unveiling, the final portions of that which has been hidden through the ages. All of the seven seals are now loosed from off the book. The Holy Spirit is that seal which either withholds knowledge from a certain people or a certain age or reveals that knowledge for a certain period or a certain age (Ephesians 1:13; 4:30). Thank God, all the seals have been loosed, and the Holy Spirit has been allowed to give a full understanding. There is "a little book opened" (Revelation 10:2); the mystery is being completed. What a precious day in which to live! We can have just as much truth as we can take in for it is all laid open to us.

Because we live in a day of great revelation, the Lord is revealing precious truths to us. Yet, for too many, sadly, many truths remain a mystery. It need not be so. The Apostle Paul let us know in Ephesians 1:18 that "The eyes of your understanding being enlightened." The Amplified Bible renders it thus: "By having the eyes of your heart flooded with light" He does not want us to be in darkness on any truth. He wants us to be "flooded with light." Psalm 119:130 says that "light" is "understanding." God wants us to have understanding. He gave His Word so we could understand.

In Ephesians 1:9 the Apostle wrote of how God "hath purposed in himself." He mentioned in verse 11, "according to the purpose." Let us consider these expressions. In verse 9 the word "*purposed*" in the Greek is the word *proetheto*. It means "to set before." *The New Strong's Expanded Dictionary of Bible Words With Vine's*

Understanding the Providence of God

Completed Compensatory Dictionary says it in this manner: "Which lays stress upon the personal interest which God had in so doing." The Greek word in verse 11 for the English word "purpose" is a former derivative of the same Greek word used in verse 9. The word there is *prothesis*. It means "setting forth, intention." One puts forth his purpose first, and then acts. This reveals that God has an *intention or purpose* based on His *personal interest* in every one of our lives.

There is a children's song entitled "God Has a Plan for My Life." The chorus says, "*I just can't wait to see, What's in store for me, 'Cause God has a plan for my life.*" It is important that we understand these words "purposed" and "purpose," because they reveal to us that God has an *intention or purpose* based upon His *personal interest* in us. Once we have experienced what verse 5 of our text denotes as "the adoption of children," once we have been partakers of what verse 7 describes as "redemption through his blood," then verse 11 lets us know that he "worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." One rendering says, "Who achieves his purposes by his sovereign will." Another offers it as "who in all that happens is carrying out his own fixed purpose." The providence of God is when God is carrying out *His own fixed purpose*.

God has an intention or purpose based on His personal interest in our lives.

The Bible speaks of providence. Although Tertullus used it in the wrong context, Acts 24:2 reveals what the word means. It reads, "And when he [Paul] was called forth, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying, Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence." The word "providence" here is the word *pronoia* in the Greek. It means "forethought." It comes from the root word *pronoao*, which means "to consider in advance; that is to look out for beforehand." *Webster's New World Dictionary* defines "providence" as "foresight; looking to; a preparation for the future." As we study this, we must be mindful that we are dealing with God. Isaiah 46:10 describes Him as, "Declaring the end from the beginning." Isaiah 46:9 says, ". . . I am God, and . . . there is none like me." Because God knows "the end from the beginning," then God, in His omniscience, can prepare, or set things in motion, with a foresight that only He has. He is the only One who can do that. He is the only One who has that all-knowing ability. No one else can tell you what will happen at the end before it ever begins.

Our text is holding forth that same truth. Ephesians 1:3 reads, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." In other words, because of the spiritual position we are in ("in heavenly places in Christ," or in the church), we have an ability to have an understanding of truth that others are not privileged to understand. We read in Ephesians 1:4, "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world . . ." God is taking us back to eternity past. The Bible lets us know that Christ's Crucifixion was "foreordained before the foundation of the world" (1 Peter 1:20). God knew what man would do and made provision before He ever created man. Before there was ever a world or man, there was a plan. Back in the counsel halls of eternity past, in the mind's eye of God, Christ was planned to be the sacrifice for man's atonement.

Before there was ever a world or man, God had a plan.

"Before the foundation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4), God already had the plan formulated that He would

have a people who would be holy, without sin. He is an omniscient God. Now, do not misunderstand. It is the *plan* that was predestined. God does not predestine individuals. We are creatures of choice, free moral agencies. We have the power of choice. But the plan was preordained, because He knows "the end from the beginning."

**Only God knows
the end from
the beginning.**

The plan was foreordained, and God also knows each of us and has a plan for every individual. He has a perfect will for every person. Isaiah 46:10 reads, "Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel [verse 11 of our text says He 'worketh all things after the counsel of his own will'] shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure." God has a "counsel." Psalm 33:11 reads, "The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations." Here is an example of Hebrew parallelism, where truth is stated in one manner in the first part of a couplet and then reiterated in a second part of the couplet to clarify it. God's "counsel" is "the thoughts of his heart." His counsel is His purpose.

Isaiah 46:10 in the Septuagint (the Old Testament Bible in use at the First Advent of Christ) says it in this manner: "I will do all things that I have planned." According to Psalm 147:5, God's "understanding is infinite." Psalm 119:130 teaches clearly that "understanding" is "light." When people say, "I saw the light," they are saying, "I gained understanding." John tells us in 1 John 1:5 that "God is light." Speaking of this light, the Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 6:16, ". . . dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto." That is how brilliant it is.

To compare ourselves with One who "is light" and whose "understanding is infinite" is as the songwriter penned in the song "God's Way Is Best": *"Tis only that our earth-dimmed vision The truth can never clearly know."* We can never attain in this life to the infinite knowledge that God has. We will never be in a position, as a human creature, to know the end from the beginning. That takes omniscience, an all-knowing power. Isaiah 42:9 tells us, "Behold, the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare: before they spring forth I tell you of them." Only God has that power. Certainly, we know that He can give some insight and foresight to prophets, and they can foretell, but it still must come from God.

We read in Isaiah 55:8-9: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, [How many times have you marveled at how God worked out circumstances and situations in ways you never dreamed He would do? You might have had some thought in your mind of how God would work it, but while you were standing at the front door watching for it, He throws it in the back window.] neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

We must ever be reminded that we are finite, but He is infinite. We are shortsighted, but He is farsighted. When we read in Isaiah 55:8, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts," the Septuagint renders that as "For my counsels are not your counsels." This brings us right back again to "the counsel" that God said He would perform. When our text speaks of this in verse 11, the word "worketh" is used—a present and continual tense. God is working throughout the entirety of our lives "all things after the counsel of his own will."

God has an overarching (comprehensive, all-inclusive) will for each of us. Jeremiah 1:5 tells us, "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; [This is a divine work. God may use human instrumentality, but life is a divine work. No one can give life but God, and God said in Ezekiel 18:4, 'all souls are mine.' When conception

Understanding the Providence of God

takes place, God puts a soul right in there.] and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations." Before Jeremiah was ever born, God had a purpose. I want to clarify, we are not eliminating free moral agency, but we are talking about God's *perfect* will, His providential will. Because of His infinite foreknowledge and His omniscience, God has a counsel that He desires to perform in every life. We can see it here concerning Jeremiah.

Consider the Apostle Paul. Look at Ephesians 1:1, which says, "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God . . ." That was not Paul's will initially. He was going down to Damascus with papers to persecute those who had embraced the truth (Acts 9:1-2). He had sent many men and women to jail (Acts 8:3). He consented to Stephen's stoning. When Acts 8:1 says that "Saul was consenting," it reveals that what happened to Stephen was an execution. A legal execution could not have taken place without a judicial order. Saul was one of the judges who sat on the Jewish Sanhedrin, the supreme court of the Jews in that day. He was the one who gave the judicial order to have Stephen executed. Paul's own testimony confirms what he did to the believers. Galatians 1:13 reads, "For ye have heard of my conversation [or conduct] in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it."

However, in Ephesians 1:1 we find that he became "an apostle . . . by the will of God." We read in Galatians 1:15-16: "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb [birth is a divine work], and called me by his grace, To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen." From the "womb" God already had a plan and a purpose and a will for Paul's life.

Praying According to the Providential Will

Acts 10:34 tells us that "God is no respecter of persons." He has a will for everyone's life. Galatians 1:15, in *The Emphatic Greek Diaglott*, states, "But when it pleased that God who set me apart from my birth, and called me by his favor." Again, these verses are not teaching an unconditional predestination or foreordination. There are those who teach an unconditional predestination, that you are either predestinated for Heaven or predestinated for hell and that there is nothing you can do to make any difference. As Isaiah 1:18 says, "Come now, let us reason together."

If there were any truth to that doctrine, why would we need a Gospel? Who would need to be preached to? Why would we be admonished so closely on how to live and conduct ourselves if it was all preordained, predetermined, predestined and nothing you could do would make any difference? That is a false teaching. When you read the words "*foreordination*" and "*predestination*" in the Scriptures, it is not talking of an unconditional predestination of individuals. Throughout the Bible, we are told to choose. Let us look at a few examples:

Deuteronomy 30:19 – "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."

1 Kings 18:21 – "And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word."

Joshua 24:15 – "And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."

We are creatures of choice, but there is a sovereign will, a providence, that God desires to work in our lives.

God's Word is His will. This Bible that we have, though it is a library of sixty-six books, is the most condensed book in human history (John 21:25). There are principles incorporated in the Word of God, but not every detail. According to Deuteronomy 29:29, "The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law." The Bible, the Word of God, contains the will of God, but it is not *all* the will of God. There is not enough room for the personal will He has for every individual in humanity, throughout the ages of time, to be recorded in sixty-six books. However, the principles are incorporated.

For example, I once heard a brother say that some thought God should have addressed smoking specifically. Perhaps He should have told Moses to include the commandment, "Thou shalt not smoke Camels." Can you imagine what those people might have been thinking? "Well, I had better watch where I park my camel. I had

Understanding the Providence of God

better not get him too close to the fire because the Law says not to smoke my camel." A commandment like that (in 1491 B.C.) would not mean what it means today. The Bible is a timeless book that contains principles, not always specific laws and commandments applicable to every age. There is not a verse in the Bible that says, "Do not shoot your veins full of cocaine or heroin," but we know that is against God's will because of the principles which are incorporated in the Scriptures.

We must remember there are two witnesses (Revelation 11:3), which are the Word and the Spirit (Matthew 24:14; Hebrews 10:15). One is called the "word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15), and the other is called the "Spirit of truth" (John 16:13). They both play an integral part. It is important to understand that much of what God has in mind in His counsel for your individual life is not spelled out specifically in the Scriptures. His counsel will never contradict the principles of the Scriptures, for the Spirit of God and the Word of God agree (1 John 5:7-8). The Spirit of God and the providence of God will never contradict or go against the principles in the Scriptures. Again, the Scriptures set the principles, not the specifics.

Notice what John penned concerning prayer. First John 5:14-15 states: "And this is the confidence [the Greek says 'boldness,' the same Greek word used in Hebrews 4:16 which says we can come with boldness to the throne of grace] that, we have in him, that if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him." God answers every prayer He hears. Sometimes when we pray, He does not hear, and the reason is that it is not in accordance with His will. I will take you a step further. There were times when Jesus prayed, and God did not hear. There were times when Paul prayed, and God did not hear. Why? They were not praying according to His will. God has an overarching, providential will. If our praying does not fall into the premises of that providential will, He does not hear it.

God's will in its entirety is not specifically spelled out in the Scriptures.

Let me clarify the expressions of "heareth" and "hear" in 1 John 5:14-15. The Greek word in both verses is *akouó*, which is also translated as to "hearken" (Mark 4:3, 7:14; Acts 4:19, 7:2, 15:13; James 2:5) or "give audience" (Luke 20:45; Acts 13:16, 15:12, 22:22). Obviously, we know that in His omniscience, the Lord hears everything. Genesis 18:20-21 reads: "And the LORD said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous; I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know."

However, in His divinity, these verses in 1 John are telling us He does not "hear" or "hearken" or "give audience" to everything. So, when we use "hear" in this study, it is more accurately "hearken." Although the Lord does not "hear," or more accurately "hearken" to every petition or supplication that is not in accordance to His will, Hebrews 4:15 tells us he can be "touched with the feeling of our infirmities" and that He provides "grace to help" (Hebrews 4:16) as He did to the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:9.

Sometimes when we pray for certain things and we do not receive that for which we prayed, it is because it was contrary to God's providential will. Let us look at 1 John 5:14 in the Amplified Bible: ". . . if we ask anything (make any request) according to His will (in agreement with His own plan), He listens to and hears us." Our prayers must be in accordance with His own plan. According to our text, He is working "all things after the counsel of his own will." Consider two instances in the Bible when praying was not according to His will.

We read in Matthew 26:36-42: "Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me. And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour?"

"Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: [The disciples were not in temptation, they were asleep. Who was in temptation? Jesus was.] the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. [Of whose flesh was He speaking? His flesh. He was not a superhuman in His physical form. Hebrews 2:16 says, 'He took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham.' He was 'made like unto his brethren'; Hebrews 2:17. He was flesh, blood, and bones, just as we are. Jesus prayed, 'Let this cup pass,' but God did not hear that. So, He went back the second time.] He went away again the second time and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass"

**Although He
knew God's will,
Jesus prayed for
the cup to pass.**

Jesus wanted that cup to pass. His flesh wanted the cup to pass. Now, He knew the will of God. Although He was all man, He was also all God. He knew the will of God. Look at what He said in John 12:27: "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour." He knew it was "for this cause" that He came into this world. He was "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8). He knew for this cause He came and said, in so many words, "Can I ask God to save me from this because that is the very purpose for which I came?" Yet, when the hour came, when the flesh became weak, that is exactly how He prayed. "Let this cup pass." That was the flesh praying, and it was not until the third time, when He finally brought the flesh under submission that He gained the victory.

Jesus knew the will of God, but He had been praying the will of the flesh. Many times, we pray the will of the flesh, but we do it in ignorance. Jesus was omniscient; He knew the will of God in this manner. He knew it before He ever graced the shores of time. Christ is a perfect example of God's foreknowledge and providential planning and will. The Apostle Peter revealed this in his message on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2:23 when he spoke of Christ's Crucifixion and declared it was "by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God." However, we do not always know God's providential will for our life or even a portion of our life. Thus, we may very well pray a fleshly prayer, and when we do, God does not hear it because it is not in accordance with His providential will.

Let us look at another example. Consider Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:7-9, which reads: "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, [Where was the thorn at? In the flesh.] the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. [What was he praying for? The flesh.] And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee." God was saying: "I am not taking the thorn. I will leave the thorn. You will have to get victory over it."

The thorn was in God's will. Paul's praying was not in God's providential will. Therefore, yes, in His omniscience, God heard, but in His divinity He did not hearken or give audience to the petitions. One might say,

Understanding the Providence of God

"It is always right to pray." Not always. After the great victory at Jericho, Joshua failed to pray before they went up to take Ai. Joshua did not know that sin had entered the camp. He did not pray before he sent them in. They were sent without divine direction, and thirty-six men were killed. Joshua came back and got on his face and prayed, but God said, in essence: "Get up. It is not time to pray now. There is sin in the camp. It is time to take action" (Joshua 7:1-13).

I realize this runs counter to common thinking, but it is not always right to pray. Joshua should have prayed *before* he made his move not *after* he had to deal with the problem. Many people believe that God hears, or hearkens to, every prayer, but He does not. He hears only those prayers prayed in accordance with His will. Again, God did not hear those examples of the prayers of Christ and Paul. The Lord did not take the thorn in the flesh away because it was not His will. Our praying may be fervent and it may be repeated, but if it is outside His providential purpose or will, He does not hear it, or give audience to it.

CHAPTER THREE

Examples of God Working His Providential Purpose

Let us consider scriptural substantiation that shows clear evidence of God working His providential purpose. Consider Joseph. After his father had passed, his brethren were fearful that he would take reprisal on them for their dastardly deeds of the past. Joseph said in Genesis 50:20, "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." The Septuagint says, "Ye took counsel against me for evil, but God took counsel for me for good that the matter might be as it is today." God was working His counsel, His thoughts, His will in the life of Joseph.

We find the narrative in Genesis 37:3-4, 23-27: "Now Israel [speaking of Jacob, whose name had been changed to Israel] loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colours. And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him. . . . And it came to pass, when Joseph was come unto his brethren, that they stript Joseph out of his coat, [That coat was an emblem of their father's favoritism. Some scholars say it was a coat assembled similar to what royalty would wear, and it put Joseph in a superior position to his brothers. They hated that. They were envious, jealous. Therefore, the first thing they did was to strip him out of that coat, as if to say: 'You will not reign over us. You are nobody; you are no better than we are.'] his coat of many colours that was on him;

"And they took him, and cast him into a pit [actually, it was a cistern]: and the pit was empty, there was no water in it. And they sat down to eat bread: and they lifted up their eyes and looked, and, behold, a company of Ishmeelites came from Gilead with their camels bearing spicery and balm and myrrh, going to carry it down to Egypt. And Judah said unto his brethren, What profit is it if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood? Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmeelites, and let not our hand be upon him; for he is our brother and our flesh. And his brethren were content."

God's overarching, providential will was working through this entire episode. As long as Joseph was a favored, spoiled son down in father's house, he could not accomplish God's plan for him. Now, although his brethren had murder in their hearts, that was not God's will. So, God circumvented their thinking, causing them to consider selling Joseph and making a profit out of the deal. That was in God's providential planning. He wanted to get Joseph to Egypt. Joseph did not know that; his brethren did not know that; and Jacob did not know that, but God in His omnipotence and omniscience knows "the end from the beginning." He knew what was on the horizon. He knew there was seven years of famine coming, and if He did not do something, the Israelites would all starve.

There were only seventy Israelites at this juncture (Genesis 46:27). When the famine hit the land, if God had not had a plan in motion, His seed would have died. So, God had a plan to save His people from starvation. He saw this young man with great promise and potential named Joseph, and He began to work His overarching, providential plan. He had to get Joseph in a position to fulfill that plan. Paul said over in 2 Corinthians 13:8, "For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth." Joseph's brothers thought they were doing despite, but

Understanding the Providence of God

God was using them, as despicable as their intentions were, in His overarching, providential plan.

Think with me of Joseph when he was in that pit, or that cistern. I am sure he cried and appealed to his brothers: "Get me out. What are you doing? What is wrong? Do not leave me down here." Allow me to surmise. Joseph was a natural man, and I am sure he pled and cried and prayed. Joseph was a very Godly man. No doubt, he prayed: "Lord, deliver me! Get me out of here." I believe Joseph was bewildered and dumbfounded, but God was working, as our text says, "the counsel of his own will" (verse 11).

Joseph's will was to get out of that cistern and get back to his father, but that was not God's will. Genesis 39:1-6 tells us: "And Joseph was brought down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard [the Hebrew and the Amplified Bible both tell us he was the chief of the executioners, a very responsible position in Pharaoh's court], an Egyptian, bought him of the hands of the Ishmeelites, which had brought him down thither. And the LORD was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. And his master saw that the LORD was with him, and that the LORD made all that he did to prosper in his hand. And Joseph found grace in his sight, and he served him: and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he had he put into his hand.

Although he did not know it, Joseph's paths were being directed.

"And it came to pass from the time that he had made him overseer in his house, and over all that he had, that the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of the LORD was upon all that he had in the house, and in the field. And he left all that he had in Joseph's hand; and he knew not ought he had, save the bread which he did eat. And Joseph was a goodly person, and well favoured."

The counsel of God's own will was to put Joseph into a position where he could develop his abilities. He was made, essentially, chief of staff over a large estate. Potiphar was a fabulously wealthy man. God, in His infinite wisdom, placed Joseph there to be trained and prepared for God's providential will. God was with him and so blessed him that Potiphar turned everything over to him. Potiphar became richer and richer and richer because Joseph was such an able administrator. Then the episode with Potiphar's wife came up. She tried to seduce Joseph, but being a Godly man, he would not succumb to that (Genesis 39:7-9). Because she was rejected, she became resentful, and then she lied on him. As a result, Genesis 39:20 says, "And Joseph's master took him, and put him into the prison [but not just any prison], a place where the king's prisoners were bound: and he was there in the prison."

God brought Joseph down to Egypt and got him into Potiphar's house. (This was not just happenstance but, again, an act of divine providence.) God then began to hone Joseph's administrative skills by making him chief of staff on Potiphar's large estate. Once that was accomplished, God knew Joseph needed to be in the right position when the right time came. He was sent to prison, but not just any prison. He went to the prison where Pharaoh's prisoners were kept (Genesis 39:20).

This particular prison was used because Potiphar was part of Pharaoh's court. Again, this shows God's providential working. This was where Joseph would meet Pharaoh's baker and butler. He would not have met them just in any prison. All along God was working His plan, His purpose, His will. None of this was known to Joseph. Joseph could not look in the Book of Genesis and read how this would end. It had not been written yet. These "things were written for our learning" (Romans 15:4), but Joseph had no idea what God was working.

(Often, we, too, have no idea of what God is working until much later.)

We find in Genesis 39:21 that when Joseph went to prison, "the LORD was with Joseph." God will go with you if you have to go to prison. He will go with you in whatever circumstances He places you. Isn't that wonderful? Genesis 39:21-22 reads: "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 there, he was the doer of it." The warden made him the chief trustee, or administrator, of the prison. One rendering says that he handed over the entire prison administration to Joseph. Can you see how God was schooling Joseph, preparing him, honing those abilities to a fine point? Joseph did not know what all this was preparing him for, but God did. Yet, Joseph was submissive.

I am sure that Joseph would have never chosen to have been carried away from his father, from his home, and from his family. I believe all along the way, he was praying: "Lord, what is going on here? Why is this happening to me? I have done nothing wrong." No doubt, he prayed when they stripped him of his coat, and he prayed when they put him in the pit. Every mile of the way as he looked over his shoulder and saw everything that was familiar getting further and further in the distance, I am sure he was bewildered and dumbfounded, not knowing what was happening or why. That is where trusting the Lord comes in.

Proverbs 3:6 says, "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." Although he did not know it, Joseph's paths were being directed. I imagine he prayed when he was up on that auction block, but God had just the right man buy him. He ended up in Potiphar's house because Potiphar was part of the king's court. That is how Joseph eventually ended up in Pharaoh's prison. He would not have ended up in Pharaoh's prison, if Potiphar had not been part of Pharaoh's court. God had just the right man buy him, and then He blessed Joseph and honed his skills there in Potiphar's house.

Joseph was lied on, mistreated, and forgotten, but God had a plan.

Just about the time Joseph had adjusted to that, God saw it was time to move His plan forward. So, He allowed Potiphar's wife lie on Joseph. Did you know that there are times when people can lie on you, and God can turn it around to your good? It is hard to see that, but God did here. Joseph would have never chosen to be carried away, sold at an auction, lied about, and sent to prison, but it was all part of God's providential plan.

It was in prison where Joseph met Pharaoh's baker and the butler. They both had a dream, and Joseph interpreted their dreams, telling them what would occur. One would be executed; one would be restored. Joseph said in Genesis 40:14, "But think on me when it shall be well with thee, and shew kindness, I pray thee, unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house." Joseph wanted out of prison, just as anybody else would, but verse 23 tells us, "Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him." Joseph's will was "Get me out of this," and many times, in difficult situations, we pray, "Get me out!" That is the human, but look what happened to Joseph. Genesis 41:1 reads, "And it came to pass at the end of two full years" The butler forgot him for two years. Why? It was not God's time yet. God let it slip from the butler's mind because it was not time yet.

Human nature says, "Get me out of this!"

Two years later, Joseph was thirty years old (Genesis 41:46), which later was when a Jew could officially enter sacred service (Numbers 4:30), and Pharaoh had some dreams. (Genesis, Chapter 41, describes those dreams.) Pharaoh did not know

Understanding the Providence of God

what they meant. Genesis 41:9-14 reads: "Then spake the chief butler unto Pharaoh, saying, I do remember my faults this day [Divine providence brought things right to the position for which God had been preparing Joseph for much of his life]: 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. Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they brought him hastily out of the dungeon: and he shaved himself, and changed his raiment, and came in unto Pharaoh."

After Joseph interpreted the dream, explaining that there would be seven years of plenty (represented by fat cattle and good ears) and seven years of famine (represented by lean cattle and lean ears), we read in Genesis 41:34-41: "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.

"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."

Joseph was elevated from the chief trustee at the prison to the prime minister of Egypt. That was God's overarching, providential plan. That is why He did not answer Joseph's prayer to get him out of the pit. That is why He did not answer Joseph's prayer and send him back home. That is why He did not answer Joseph's prayer at Potiphar's house or the prayer in the prison. God was working "all things after the counsel of his own will" (Ephesians 1:11). Genesis 39:2 says that "the LORD was with Joseph," and Genesis 39:21 also says that "the LORD was with Joseph." The Lord was in all that occurred. When Joseph realized it, he said in Genesis 50:20, "But as for you [his brethren], ye thought evil against me [or the Septuagint says 'took counsel']; but God [He worked His counsel] meant it unto good"

**The good God is
working is for
His purpose.**

CHAPTER FOUR

The Personal Aspect of God's Plan

We must also remember those precious words in Romans 8:28, which state, "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 good He works is for His purpose. He did not say everything *was* good, but it works together *for* good. When God works all the parts of His purpose together, just as Joseph said: "You meant it for evil; God meant it for good." All things work together; together, they are good. Many times, people will look at the circumstances in their life and say, "I do not see any good in this." There might not be good in just that alone.

Let me use this illustration. When making a cake, you might start with a box of cake mix. Does anybody want to sit down with a spoon and start eating that dry cake mix out of the box? Does that taste good? Next, you would crack two raw eggs and put them with the cake mix. Does that taste good? No! Are you ready to eat yet? Add some vegetable oil. Are you ready to eat yet? When all the ingredients are put in and it gets worked together, then it must go into the heat. After that, it comes out as a nice cake, and everybody wants to eat it, because it all worked together for good.

So it is with situations in life. They are working together for good, but it is good according to His purpose, not my purpose and not your purpose. As you may face difficult dilemmas in life, keep in mind that God is working His purpose. You may pray as Joseph did, "Get me out," or as Paul, "Take it away," but that is the flesh praying. God has a purpose and we have to learn to submit to that purpose. We may not see what He is doing, but God is not working against us. God is for us (Romans 8:31), and He is working for us. If we will submit, stay committed and consecrated to Him, He will work together all things for our good according to His purpose.

God has a personal interest in us, not just a collective interest. The wonderful truth of John 3:16 ("For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son") speaks in a collective sense, but the Scripture brings it down closer in 2 Peter 3:9, which reads, "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to *us-ward*, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." That brings it beyond being merely collective and brings it down to the individual; it brings it down personally. God has a personal interest in each of our lives.

Again, the Greek word in verse 11 for "purpose" is defined as "setting forth, intention." This reveals that God has an intention. He has acts that are put into motion born of His intention, or based upon His personal interest in each of us. When we think of that, we realize that salvation is not a collective act in the truest sense. It is brought right down to an individual, personal experience. In that experience, God has a personal interest, an intention. He has that which He wants to see accomplished in each of our lives.

The Apostle Peter set it forth in 1 Peter 1:19-20 when he wrote that "Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for *you*." This brings it down to a personal Savior and a personal experience. Before God ever made

Understanding the Providence of God

a man, He made a plan. We read in Isaiah 46:10: "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure." This is the same as verse 9 of our text, which states, "Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure" God will work His pleasure. He has a corporate plan, but He also has an intimately personal plan for each of us.

Verse 5 of this text reveals the personal aspect of God's plan. It reads, "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children" If you were to adopt a child, you would get letters of adoption. Those letters would say that the child now legally belongs to you. As that child grows, he will not have your physical features. If his natural father had large ears, he may have large ears, and you may have small ones. If his natural father had a large nose, he may have a large nose; yet, you may have a small one. Those letters make him legally yours, but they do not do a thing about his nature because they are just letters. His genetics did not change.

When we are spiritually adopted, God does not give us *letters* of adoption; He gives us "the *Spirit* of adoption." Thus, we take on His very nature and His characteristics. Romans 8:14-15 reads: "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father."

We read in 2 Peter 1:4, "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature" When we have this adoption, it is a spiritual one; our nature is changed. Before one was saved, he might have had a nasty tongue, but salvation changes that. When your spirit changes, it changes you. Romans 8:29 tells us, "For whom he did foreknow, [He foreknew *all*. He is not willing that *any* should perish.] he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son"

The Emphatic Greek Diaglott does not say conformed, but it says "to be copies." We have to become copies. Look at John 14:8-9. It reads: "Phillip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Phillip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father." Because we are conformed to His image, we can say, "He that has seen me has seen Christ."

We are copies of Him. The plan predestinated that everyone who comes through salvation would receive "the adoption of children [How?] by Jesus Christ [or by the Word brought by Christ] to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will" (Ephesians 1:5). What is His will? He is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). That is a portion of His will.

This providential working of God is not arbitrary, nor is it only universal, but as we are dealing with it contextually, we find that it pertains to "the adoption of children" (verse 5), those who "have redemption" (verse 7), those who have been adopted, who have become a child of God, who received the spirit of adoption and have enjoyed redemption. It is those to whom verse 9 says, "Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself." These verses of our text are not teaching an unconditional, predestination; rather, it is teaching that for those who are His, who have experienced the adoption, embraced redemption, and had their nature changed, there is a sovereign will, a providence, that God desires to work in their lives.

It is our concern that because of those who hyper-Calvinize predestination, all

**God is working
His sovereign
will in those
who have
experienced
"the adoption."**

thought of a sovereign providence is dismissed from consideration. To do so is as unsound as it is to be hyper-Calvinistic and teach unlimited sovereignty and providence and predestination over which man has no choice. One extreme is as faulty as the other. Those who are known as hyper-Calvinists believe you are either predestinated for Heaven or hell and there is nothing you can do to change it. If that is true, we need not be preached to, we need not be taught or warned.

If we are automatically predestinated, if nothing we do makes any difference, then why do anything? That is exactly the damnable part of that doctrine. People who embrace that thought often do nothing about their soul. They rest in a damnable doctrine that they are predestinated, that they are set and sealed. That is a damnable lie! That is a heresy which damns the souls of those who trust it.

It is not just a *false* doctrine, but it is a *damnable* doctrine (2 Peter 2:1). People trust in that. They go right on professing to be Christian yet continue to live in sin. Jesus said in John 8:21, "I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins: whither I go, ye cannot come." If you die in sin, where Jesus is, you are not going, and neither is anyone else, regardless of their religious profession. If there is sin in your life, you are not going where He is. It is important to understand that our Scripture text is not teaching an unfettered, unconditional eternal security. Rather, it is for those who have experienced "the adoption," who have had a change of spirit, who have become partakers of His divine nature, and who enjoy the benefits of His "redemption." Those are the ones in whom He desires to work His sovereign will, His providential purpose.

CHAPTER FIVE

Additional Instances of Divine Providence

Let us in overview consider some other instances of providential operation. In the Book of Esther is an account that shows the operation of the providential plan. Certainly, there are a whole host of truths incorporated in this book, many types and typical truths are portrayed. First Corinthians 10:11 tells us that the Old Testament occurrences are "ensamples," or the Greek word means they serve as types.

It might be well to state that types generally are not perfect types or complete in every detail. For instance, we know Ahasuerus was a heathen king and certainly Christ was not a heathen, but He was a king, a sovereign, and in that capacity is the type derived. So, it is with many types. They may also often have more than one representation.

In the first chapter, the king (Ahasuerus) commanded the queen (Vashti) to come, and she rebelled (Esther 1:11-12). So, he put her away and began to secure another wife (Esther 1:19, 2:2-4). That serves as a type of Christ, who is "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS" (Revelation 19:16). Isaiah tells us that He was married to old Israel (Isaiah 54:5), but old Israel became rebellious (Ezekiel 2:3). So, He gave her a bill of divorcement and put her away (Jeremiah 3:8). Now He is married to another, the bride of Christ, or the New Testament church (Revelation 19:7, 21:9). There are many typical truths, but we want to stay with the vein of this study, the providential plan.

We read in Esther 2:7-9: "And he [speaking of Mordecai] 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. So it came to pass, when the king's commandment and his decree was heard, and when many maidens were gathered together unto Shushan the palace, to the custody of Hegai, that Esther was brought also unto the king's house, to the custody of Hegai, keeper of the women. And the maiden pleased him, [I want you to see providence working. Here were many, many beautiful maidens. She was not even of the Persian descent. She was a Hebrew, a different nationality. Yet, out of all these women, Esther 'pleased him.'] and she obtained kindness of him."

God, who knows the end from the beginning, knew what Vashti would do. He knew that Vashti would be removed. Once the king issued the decrees and young maidens (including Esther) were brought to the palace, which was providential action, God moved on Hegai, who was the "keeper of the women" (Esther 2:3). Esther "pleased him, and she obtained kindness of him" (Esther 2:9). Verse 9 says that "he preferred her." Are you beginning to see the providential plan put in motion here?

Esther 2:15-17 tells us: "Now when the turn of Esther, the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her for his daughter, was come to go in unto the king, she required nothing but what Hegai the king's chamberlain, the keeper of the women, appointed. And Esther obtained favour in the sight of all them that looked upon her. So Esther was taken unto king Ahasuerus into his house royal in the tenth month, which is the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign. And the king loved Esther above all the women, and she obtained

grace and favour in his sight more than all the virgins; so that he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti."

Why would this story be noteworthy in the Scripture? There have been many kings and queens down throughout history. Why is this one notable? We find the reason in Haman's plot, described in Esther 3:6, which says, ". . . wherefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus, even the people of Mordecai." Haman, who was second in command in the kingdom (Esther 3:1), had coaxed the king into making a decree that would have had all the Jews executed (Esther 3:11-13). He would have essentially wiped out the entirety of Judaism, but God knows the end from the beginning; and He set things in motion.

When Mordecai understood the decree, he tore off his clothes and put sackcloth and ashes on (Esther 4:1). When Esther sent word to find out what was going on, Mordecai told her, and then he made a fateful statement in Esther 4:14, saying, "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

Here was God's providential plan coming to fruition. The king has already signed the decree, initiated by Haman, that all the Jews were to be executed. But unknown to the king and Haman, the queen that the king favored above all the others was a Jew. After fasting and praying, she went into the king, and he held out the scepter. She had found favor (Esther 5:2). If you have studied the Book of Esther, you know what happened. Esther successfully interceded for the lives of her people. Haman ended up being hung on the very gallows he had built to hang Mordecai on (Esther 7:10). Galatians 6:7 warns, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Jesus said that "all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword" (Matthew 26:52). Esther saved her life and her people's lives, the Israelites. She saved a people whose posterity would produce the Savior for all mankind. There would not have been any Savior from the lineage of David if they had executed them all under King Ahasuerus. Yet God knew the end from the beginning. His plan was that the Redeemer would be from the seed of Abraham. God had to preserve that seed. Thus, He providentially put Esther in a place for just such a time as this. Haman was executed, the decree was countermanded, and then Mordecai was elevated to the position Haman had occupied (second in the kingdom).

**Esther's story is
a Biblical
example of the
providential plan.**

Esther 10:1-3 tells us: "And the king Ahasuerus laid a tribute upon the land, and upon the isles of the sea. And all the acts of his power and of his might, and the declaration of the greatness of Mordecai, whereunto the king advanced him, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia? For Mordecai the Jew was next unto king Ahasuerus, and great among the Jews, and accepted of the multitude of his brethren, seeking the wealth of his people, and speaking peace to all his seed."

All of that happened because Esther yielded to the providential plan. She was brought to that position in that place for that purpose. God worked His purpose, just as He did in Joseph's life. No doubt, neither Joseph nor Esther understood what was happening through the many steps along the way. But God had His hand in it all. It was all part of His providential plan. He was working, as Ephesians 1:11 says, "all things after the counsel of his own will."

Let us consider a couple more instances of providential purpose. Consider the Apostle Paul in Acts 16:19-

22, which reads: "And when her masters [this took place after Paul cast the spirit of divination out of the woman] saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers, And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans [that was a false charge]. And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them."

Go back earlier in this chapter and read of when Paul sought divine direction concerning where to go. Acts 16:6-7 says: "Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia [provinces of Asia Minor], and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, [The Spirit of God would not allow them to go any further east. They were forbidden.] After they were come to Mysia [they moved west], they assayed to go into Bithynia [north]: but the Spirit suffered [or permitted] them not."

Here we read that they were seeking direction on which way to go, and the Spirit of God was shutting down every direction. Then verse 9 tells us that Paul had "a vision" of "a man of Macedonia [located to the west, over on the European continent] . . . saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us." Verse 10 tells us, "After he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia"

That is the first time the Gospel was taken into Europe. It was a historic move. From Europe, it eventually went to the new world, and that is how we came to have the Gospel today in North America. All because Paul listened to the Spirit of God. He saw this man in a vision, saying, "Come over into Macedonia"; in other words, do not go any further east or north, but go west. Paul saw a man in his vision, but Acts 16:14-15 tells us that the first converts were women in the household of Lydia. After that, the woman with the spirit of divination began to trouble them. Finally, Paul rebuked that spirit, and that is when the uprising came. (Anytime you confront the devil head on, that is when you will be contested. People will rise up against you. They rose up against Paul and Silas.)

Look at Acts 16:23, which says, "And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely." In those days, if a jailer lost his charge, he forfeited his life in the place of the prisoners. He was told to keep them safely. Thus, Acts 16:24 tells us, "Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks." If you permit me the liberty to surmise a little, they had been stripped of their garments, no doubt, and beaten with a Roman cat-of-nine tails. Their backs were peeled and flayed, strips of flesh hanging, and then they were put in stocks with their feet fastened. Silas might have looked over at Paul and said: "Paul, tell me again about that vision you had. Are you certain that you understood it right? Is this really where we are supposed to be, in jail? Do you think you might have misunderstood what the Lord was directing?"

Some might say that the Bible does not say that, and that is true. But they were human creatures. I am sure there were some thoughts that crossed their minds. Paul, possibly, might have scratched his head a little and said, "Now, Lord, I did not see this in the picture." Yet, it was all part of the providential plan, because through all of this, the Philippian jailer and his family were saved. No doubt, that would never have happened if Paul had

God's providential plan for Paul and Silas included the salvation of the jailer and his household.

not been in jail. God saw a man and his family who were ripe for salvation (Acts 16:34), and they served as the seed of the congregation in Philippi.

Read the letter to the Philippian church. These were the people to whom Paul was writing. This was the beginning of the congregation in Philippi. It all started in a jail. (Talk about a jail house revival.) Amid pain and discomfort, there in the stocks of that prison, not understanding the plan, they began to sing and praise God. Then, God got happy, and there was an earthquake. All the doors opened, and all the prisoners were free. When the jailer came in and saw all those empty cells, he was ready to take his sword and thrust himself through. He knew that if the prisoners escaped, he would forfeit his own life, but Paul said, "Do thyself no harm: for we are all here" (Acts 16:28). They were all in Paul and Silas' cell. Not a one of those prisoners left.

Acts 16:29 tells us, "Then he [the jailer] called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas." What a turn of events! The very man who put them in stocks, who was keeping them in the jail, fell down before Paul and Silas and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). How would that have happened if the providential plan had not put Paul and Silas in the jail? Acts 16:32-34 lets us know this man had a real change. He and his whole house were baptized. Sometimes we wonder: "Why is this happening? Why am I here? Why am I in this situation?" It could very well be the providential plan.

It was not the path that Paul and Silas in their human thinking would have chosen, but what occurred was God's providential plan. No doubt, they were praying: "Lord, help us! Get us out of this situation!" If they prayed that way, God did not hear, or hearken, because He had an overarching, providential will. This jailer and his household became the seed of that Philippian congregation.

Consider how God used the Apostle Paul. Paul wrote thirteen of the twenty-seven books that comprise the New Testament (fourteen, if you count Hebrews, as some do). He wrote over half of the New Testament, and he wrote five of those books while under arrest in Rome. Would we have those epistles today had Paul not been sent to prison? Would he have had the time to write them? Consider the Apostle John, who wrote the Book of Revelation. He had to be banished and separated to the Isle of Patmos to receive that portion of the Word of God. The Roman emperor Domitian tried to boil John in oil to execute him.

All the other eleven Apostles had died violent deaths, but when they tried to boil John in oil, the oil would not boil him. Why? God had a providential plan He desired to fulfill. The fact that they could not boil John is so encouraging! Every time I think about that, it takes me right back to the Book of Job where God asked Satan, "Hast thou considered my servant Job?" (Job 1:8). Satan said, in verse 10, in essence, "God, You have put a hedge around him." Acts 10:34 says that "God is no respecter of persons." He has a hedge around every one of us. Satan cannot do a thing without going to God and getting a permit. Then God writes up the boundaries of the permit.

Because we are so busy, it is hard to realize that God has an overarching, providential will.

God was not finished with John. Finally, the Roman emperor banished John to the rocky island of Patmos. John said in Revelation 1:9, "I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ [or 'the spirit of prophecy'; Revelation 19:10]." John was on the isle of Patmos for the Word of God. In other words, to receive the

Understanding the Providence of God

Revelation, which at that juncture was mostly prophetic; most of it yet lay ahead in John's day.

John, the last of the original twelve apostles, no doubt was actively engaged in the work of God and in great demand. God said, in essence: "I have to get this man aside. I have got more truth I want to get to him, but I am never going to get it to him with all the distractions he has." So, God allowed John to be banished to the isle of Patmos. We read in Revelation 1:10-11: "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book"

Today, we have that book, and it has been a great blessing to the church. It has exposed Satan's devices through the annals of time. But what if John had not been sent to Patmos? I am sure being banished to Patmos was not his desire. As soon as he was exiled, no doubt, he was wondering: "Lord, all eleven of my original apostolic brethren are gone. I am the last of the original apostles. The church needs me, Lord. I do not have time to be separated from the church, to be banished and isolated. The church needs help, guidance, and direction." But God knew what the church needed. John is long gone, but what he wrote "in a book" is still blessing us today almost two thousand years later.

As soon as John was finished with the Revelation, the Roman emperor Domitian died, and the succeeding emperor, known as the humane Nerva, recalled him. John resettled in Ephesus. When he saw conditions that were working in the church, he wrote First, Second, and Third John, which chronologically are the last books of the Bible. They are very short books. Why might that be? Possibly because John was a busy man once again.

Consider John Bunyan, the author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. He wrote it while imprisoned in the Bedford jail for twelve years. We are creatures of time, and we realize that time is a precious commodity. We do not want to waste it. When we feel that there are so many things which need to be accomplished, it is hard sometimes to realize God has an overarching providential will.

When I went through a recent episode with my health, I thought: "Lord, this is extremely ill-timed. I had one sister in my congregation who had fallen and broken her tailbone; I had another sister who was to have cancer surgery; I had another saint who was still struggling with her physical condition. Then I received a call that one of the brethren lost his house and everything in it to a fire. I also had new people who needed to be taught, who needed a pastor's guidance, but there I was, confined with my foot elevated. However, I have come to see that it was part of God's providential plan. He was working "all things after the counsel of his own will."

Situations we think are ill-timed are often part of God's providential will.

I am sure John thought that it was ill-timing when he was sent to Patmos. I am sure Paul thought it was ill-timing when he landed in the Philippian jail. I am sure that John Bunyan thought it was ill-timing when he ended up in Bedford jail. However, God looks at things in the larger scheme. All those men are dead and gone, but "their works do follow them" (Revelation 14:13).

We still gain great benefit from the Pauline epistles, from the Revelation written while John was in exile, and from reading *The Pilgrim's Progress*. We gain great encouragement and lessons from the metaphors that John Bunyan used. Providence produces progress. There are many other instances that we could cite, but I trust we can see what our text means when it says that He works "according to the purpose of him who worketh all

things after the counsel of his own will" (Ephesians 1:11). Revelation 19:6 says that "the Lord God omnipotent reigneth." He reigns, and He still rules in the affairs of men.

**God views
everything in
light of the
eternal benefit.**

Isaiah 40:22-23 tells us, "It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in: That bringeth the princes to nothing; he maketh the judges of the earth as vanity." He still reigns and rules in the affairs of men. He still puts men up and puts men down. God works all things "according to the purpose."

Remember what that word "purpose" means: "to set before, have intention." God has a personal interest in each of our lives. When we can understand these truths, I think the devil will not be able to harass and accuse us when our thoughts and prayers are not as effective as we would like on certain matters. God answers every prayer for us according to His will. His thoughts are not our thoughts (Isaiah 55:8), and His counsel is not our counsel.

All of those congregations Paul preached to are gone, but his writings still bless the church today. Sometimes God has to place people in a position to accomplish things for the long-term benefit rather than the immediate. Second Corinthians 4:17 speaks of our "light affliction" and deems it so because He views everything in light of the "eternal weight," or benefit. God has an overarching, providential plan. He looks at things, viewing the end from the beginning. He looks beyond the present, beyond the immediate, and looks in the long range.

Many times in the course of life, our eyes are "holden," as were the brethren's on the Emmaus Road. Luke 24:16 tells us that as Jesus appeared to them that "their eyes were *holden* that they should not know him." There are seasons where, as these brethren were, we are "sad" (Luke 24:17) and do not realize that the situation is a divinely ordered circumstance. In this instance, Christ's death, burial, and resurrection were in accordance with the divine will. The circumstances they were lamenting were not only divinely ordered but working together for good to every repentant heart throughout the ages. This circumstance, which had so disturbed them, enabled them to be right in the presence of a glorified Christ. They were in a position where they were going to receive insight into God's Word that they otherwise would never have received.

However, as Christ "opened to us the scriptures" (Luke 24:32), these brethren were oblivious that this was indeed a divine act. Yet, the result was the same. This lets us know that although our "eyes" may be "holden" in some of the circumstances we experience, that divine purpose can be working for our good, and His intended purpose, throughout the whole episode. It was divine providence that produced the entire situation in which they were embroiled, and that same providence worked the entirety of the events to their spiritual "good." The psalmist proclaimed in Psalm 119:71, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes."

There are some truths that we can only learn experimentally, yet we would never willingly choose to go through the experience. That is why as the Patriarch Job exclaimed in his extremity that "he performeth the thing that is appointed for me: and many such things are with him" (Job 23:14).

We may not see the workings of the providential hand as we experience them. The Emmaus brethren did not, but later they did, and many times later in life we do as well.

CHAPTER SIX

The Divine Anti-Fishes and Loaves Aspect

When we give consideration to the multifaceted aspects of divine providence, there is another aspect we struggle with many times in the trying scenes of life. For lack of a better way to express it, I will term it *The Divine Anti-Fishes and Loaves Aspect*. In John, Chapter 6, we have recorded the account of where Jesus fed the five thousand. In reality, it was probably many more. John 6:10 says that "the men sat down, in number about five thousand." That did not even include women or children. If you ascribe merely one woman and child per man, that reaches 15,000! This indeed was a miraculous event.

However, this chapter gives us a keen insight into human nature and why the Lord must deal with mankind providentially in many matters. After they had eaten "as much as they would" (John 6:11) and "When they were filled" (John 6:12), it tells us that "they would come and take him by force, to make him a king" (John 6:15). Why? Jesus told us in John 6:26, "Because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled." Why did they follow Him? Because on this occasion, He satisfied their fleshly appetites and desires. When He did this, He had a massive crowd of followers and their adulation. However, later when the topic turned to spiritual truth, the sad commentary is that "From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him" (John 6:66). It was so extensive that He was reduced to only His twelve followers and even posed the question to them, "Will ye also go away?" (John 6:67).

This sad account gives us a great insight why the Lord in His omniscient wisdom accomplishes much through the avenue of providence. Being the human creatures that we are, we have a strong inclination to satisfy fleshly appetites and desires. Therefore, the very first tenet of discipleship is "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself" (Luke 9:23). However, the Scriptures teach us that "God is love" (1 John 4:8). In reality, that was the impetus for the creation of man. Love desires an object and a reciprocation. Though He "daily loadeth us with benefits" (Psalm 68:19), love does not desire that we follow and serve merely for the benefits we receive.

In His omniscient wisdom, God accomplishes much through the avenue of providence.

God's desire is the great commandment Jesus quoted, and that is recorded in Matthew 22:37-38, which states: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment." This is a moral principle and has been the Lord's desire throughout the ages. In this passage the Lord was quoting Deuteronomy 6:5, which was written in the proximity of 1451 B.C., revealing that this principle has been the Lord's desire throughout the ages.

Since the Lord desires to be the recipient of man's love and trust, He designed His plan to operate on those premises ("faith which worketh by love"; Galatians 5:6), not for fleshly features. If He merely dealt in "fishes and loaves," He would have hordes of supposed followers, just as false prosperity Gospel preachers and supposed mega-churches do today. The plan of God is designed to foster *love* not *loaves*. Therefore, Romans

8:20 tells us that "the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly." Had we had a choice in the matter, we would never have chosen to incorporate "vanity," or *The Emphatic Greek Diaglott* offers it as "frailty." We would never have chosen to be frail human creatures, but the Lord did choose to make it such.

Many times throughout life's way, we are confronted with our "frailty," but this is designed to cause us to love and trust God more. Job's famous words in his extremity come to mind: "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him" (Job 13:15). Jesus clearly let us know in Matthew 5:45 that many things which devolve upon us in life are part of the universal human experience. This enlightening verse sets forth a principle applicable in many, many situations in life. Jesus said in this verse, "he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." This reveals a very vital truth to us.

Since the Lord desires that our service to Him is based on love and trust, rather than "fishes and loaves," He allows natural experiences to come to all. He does not exempt the saints from these. Natural occurrences (comparable to "rain," such as sickness, disease, or natural disasters) can come to the saint just as they do to the sinner. The distinction is in what they accomplish in the life of a child of God. The saint has the "exceeding great and precious promises" (2 Peter 1:4) that "are yea, and in him Amen" (2 Corinthians 1:20). One of those "exceeding great and precious promises" is Romans 8:28, which tells us "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." Notice, this precious promise brings us right back to "love" and "his purpose." This reveals that His working providence lies behind "all things," even those natural reverses that we face.

Where to the world they may be an unmitigated tragedy, to the saint they can become a way, as the psalmist declared, to be brought spiritually "out into a wealthy place" (Psalm 66:12). This is where our love and trust must come into focus. Our limited human vision cannot clearly see His providential hand when He "sendeth rain," but it is all in His "purpose." We must take it such in faith and, as the Apostle Paul said in Acts 20:24, let "none of these things move me." We must love and trust in these hours. We will ultimately be the better for them.

Divine providence is working, even in times of natural reverses.

We must consecrate to the divine providential will, saying: "Lord, I do not know what You are trying to work. I do not know why this is occurring, but I trust You, and I submit to the workings of Your providential will." We must yield and be submissive and consecrated to "the purpose of him who worketh" (Ephesians 1:11). Again, the word "worketh" is a present and continual tense. As long as we are in the land of the living, He wants to continue to work "all things after the counsel of his own will."

I trust we can see this precious truth and have a better understanding of the providence of God. There is a providential will, although many times, we do not see it at first. It is not initially apparent. No doubt, after the Philippian jailer and all his household were saved, Paul said, "I see now why we were put in jail." Possibly, when Joseph went into Pharaoh and interpreted his dream and was elevated to prime minister, thus saving not only Egypt but Israel, he said, "I see it now."

There will be times when you will not see it initially, and some things only eternity will reveal. That is where you have to trust because you know the Scriptures promise "that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). He is working the good

Understanding the Providence of God

"according to *his* purpose," not our purpose. God knows what He is working, and we have to be consecrated to His providential will. Be encouraged. Paul penned that "God be for us" (Romans 8:31). He is working *everything* providentially for our good and His will.

"Be of good cheer" (John 16:33).

UNDERSTANDING THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

Have you ever wondered: "Why is this happening? Why am I in this situation?" If so, consider the lives of Joseph, Esther, the Apostle John, the Apostle Paul, and John Bunyan. Today, we read their stories, and God's providential plan is quite clear. Yet, in the midst of their difficult trials, they must have prayed, "Take it away" or "Get me out of here" or "Make it stop!" Although they could not have fully seen it at the time, God was working every difficult situation for good, for His purpose.

God is yet working His counsel, His thoughts, and His will in the lives of all who love and serve Him. We do not always know God's providential will for our life, or even a portion of our life, but we can be encouraged that:

- Throughout our entire lives, God is working "all things after the counsel of his own will."
- God's providential plan is often not something we would have chosen.
- One day we, like Joseph, will be able to look back and say, "God meant it for good!"

ISBN 978-1-79474-190-4



90000



9 781794 741904