

FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS
A study of the Providence of God
Esther 4:14

Anyone who studies the Bible carefully comes face to face with the providence of God. His hand is seen in events that unfold throughout scripture, from Genesis through Revelation. At times His working is miraculous, but at other times it is providential. In these troubling times, it is worthwhile to ask the question, “How does God work today?” This is a subject that as Christians, the better we understand it, the greater it can strengthen our faith. So let’s take a few moments to talk about the providence of God.

I. Different Views of How God Works Today

- a. **Some deny the existence or work of God altogether** (Atheism). Since there is no God, obviously he doesn’t work today.
- b. **Some believe He does not work at all** – (Deism - a worldview that says God created the world but He has not been involved in it since the miracle of creation) they believe that God does nothing in the world but He might still judge us in the end.
Some deists believe that God and the “discovery” of His will were designed by Him BEFORE or AS He created the world. Such may or may not believe in Jesus. Most of these totally deny miracles (both historically and now)
- c. **Some believe that God works miraculously**. Often this is the result of misunderstanding what a miracle really is, but at other times it is a belief in true miracles – that God works by superseding natural law. Such a view is contrary to God’s purpose based on passages such as 1 Corinthians 13:8-12, and other factors including apostolic powers (cf. Acts 8:18).
- d. **Some believe that God totally controls everything that happens**. This is the teaching of Calvinism which says that God randomly predestines the destiny of every man and everything, including who will and will not be saved. They would say that God micromanages every event and every life. In essence this teaches that man has NO free-will or control over His destiny.
- e. **Some say that the only thing God does today is related to spiritual matters** (i.e. He forgives sins, accepts praise in prayers, etc.) but in physical matters He is “hands off”.
They believe the miracles and interaction of God in the Bible are true, and that Jesus is Savior, exactly as recorded.
But since the word has been completed, He is now “hands off”. Such would say that your prayers can only be directed toward spiritual needs (such as thanking and praising Him, asking for forgiveness of sins, etc.). Such would say you should not pray for the sick, for strength in dealing with temptations, God’s help for wisdom, or for anything related to this physical world.
This is not a denial of God’s power, but simply a belief that He does not directly act for us today.
The problem with this view is how it limits many passages about Christian living to the first century only (cf. James 5:16, 1:5-7 – about prayer; about God being greater than Satan – 1 John 4:4, opportunities to reach the lost, our leaders and freedom of religion – 1 Timothy 2:1-3, etc.)
- f. **Still others believe in God’s providence**. This means that God can and does interact in the affairs of a man according to His will, but THROUGH natural means. This is the conviction I have and I would like to discuss this today.

II. What is providence?

- a. Providence is God working to accomplish a task **THROUGH** natural means. This is in contrast to God working miraculously.
- b. A key element of providence is that because it is accomplished THROUGH natural means you cannot specifically attribute it to God as it occurs (i.e. it could be coincidence, or nature simply taking its course, etc.). We will see this in some of the examples we will notice in this lesson.

- c. The word providence is a word that actually means “to see before”. The actual word is only used in scripture in reference to men, (Acts 24:2 where we find Paul has been arrested and the Jewish leaders are accusing him before Felix. He says, “*Seeing that through you we enjoy great peace, and prosperity is being brought to this nation by your foresight.*”) But that gives us an idea of how God can work providentially. He DOES know what the future holds and can see to its execution. Of course, the difference between the “foresight” attributed to Felix and that of God is that God is in COMPLETE control of the universe and can do as He will unhindered. We see this throughout scripture.
- d. We often refer to the miracles of God in scripture, but if you study the Bible you will find that MOST of His work did not involve the miraculous.
- i. For example: We find prophecies where He spoke of natural events that would occur and when. He identified individuals years before they did what they would do. Through Daniel he foretold the rise and fall of four empires (Daniel 2:44).
 - ii. Through Isaiah and later Jeremiah and Ezekiel he told of Israel and Judah’s captivities. His will was accomplished. Nations were blessed and suffered based upon their faithfulness or lack thereof. The same occurred with individuals.
 - iii. Ultimately the providence of God is seen in the fulfillment of His plan which accomplished our salvation. From Genesis 3 to the death of Jesus (and even beyond) we find His hand in all that is accomplished. Galatians 4:4 speaks of “the fullness of the time had come”
- e. Providence is best demonstrated with Biblical examples:
- i. While often God’s providential work in scripture was not clearly identified as such, we DO have examples that we can refer to.
 - ii. **Esther** – the book of Esther is about the deliverance of the Jews from destruction at the hands of the Medo-Persian Empire.
 1. A remarkable fact about this book is that it never mentions God by name, yet you cannot read a page of the book without seeing His presence and work.
 2. It is the account of Esther during the Medo-Persian Empire. Through various circumstances Esther ends up as the adored wife of Ahasuerus. Then a plot is devised by Haman, the king’s right hand servant, to destroy the Jews whom he hated. Mordecai, Esther’s cousin (his uncle’s daughter), who raised her, served as an influence to her, even after she was married to the king. Through the two of them, they were able to appear before the king and deliver the Jews from destruction.
 3. Consider Esther 4:14, where Mordecai is encouraging Esther to appear before the king on behalf of her people. He says to her, “*For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?*”
 4. The book of Esther describes a long and complex series of events that results in Israel’s deliverance. And as read through this book you will notice there are no miraculous events. But clearly, the hand of God is at work and that was recognized by the Jews as they commemorated this deliverance every year (Esther 9:18-32).
 - iii. **Joseph** – was sold into slavery by his brothers which in time, and through a great series of events (this time directly including the hand of God by way of dreams) results in him being exalted so that his family would have a place to reside outside of Canaan which God desired. His mistreatment by his brethren, being put in prison and various other acts in time made this possible. Joseph expressed it best in Genesis 50:20, “*But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.*”
 - iv. **Philemon** – this short book is about an escaped slave, Onesimus, who finds Paul in Rome and is converted to Christ. Because he is a law breaker, Paul sent him back to his master, Philemon with a letter pleading on the slave’s behalf. In the letter Paul presents a possibility

as to why these things happened. *“For perhaps he departed for a while for this purpose, that you might receive him forever”* Philemon 15

- v. And thus we can see what providence is.
- f. But does God still work providentially today? It is my conviction that He still can and DOES work in our lives. I say this because of numerous passages of scripture that would have to be dismissed if God were not at work today.
 - i. **Matthew 6:9-15**, as Jesus taught us to pray, among the things He said to pray for included: our daily bread, deliverance from temptations, forgiveness, etc. A worthy point of consideration is that the sustaining of this world is an act of His providence.
 - ii. **1 Corinthians 10:13** says, *“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”*
 - iii. **James 1:5**, *“If anyone lacks wisdom let him ask of God who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.”*
 - iv. **James 5:16**, *“the effective fervent prayer of a righteous man accomplishes much”*
 - v. **2 Corinthians 9:8-11**, *“And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work. As it is written: “He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever.” Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God.”*
 - vi. **2 Peter 2:9**, *“ then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment“*
 - vii. **1 Peter 5:7** – *casting all your cares on Him, for He cares for you.*
 - viii. These are just a few of the many passages that provide promise for His people, even today.
- g. Some thoughts on providence –
 - i. Because God may work providentially today does not mean that everything that happens is His work. When God puts the laws of nature into motion as He created the world, they became LAWS. In general, nature will take its course without God needing to do anything. The significance of understanding this is to know that there are consequences to your actions. You cannot live in perpetual sin or act foolishly and expect God to bail you out. Much of God’s law is designed to sustain itself.
 - ii. Whatever He does, is according to His will. He may choose to do nothing (and often does). **Romans 8:28** says, *“We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”* NOTE: The actual text of this verse is dealing with God accomplish HIS will in man’s redemption. Satan will NOT deter that! When we approach God, we need to keep that in mind. 1 John 5:14 says, *“Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.”*
 - iii. Let it be known that if God’s will is accomplished THROUGH natural means, it STILL demonstrates His power. He is all powerful, all seeing and all knowing.
 - iv. WE have no right to expect personal favoritism from Him.
 - v. His laws still apply. Matthew 5:45 says that he sends rains to the just and the unjust alike.
 - vi. We don’t know. Never forget that the nature of providence, because it is through natural means, can never be said that God definitely did it. At least at the moment. I do believe that as time goes by one can look back and see the hand of God at work. Such is true of Joseph, Esther, and possibly Philemon.
 - vii. Regardless of whether or not He providentially works, give Him the glory in your life. 1 Thess. 5:18 says, *“In everything give thanks.”* 1 Pet. 4:11, *“If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.”*

Conclusion: Exactly how God works today is not known, but we do know that He can, and He can accomplish His will without miracles. Therefore we can go to Him in prayer with the confidence that if we ask Him anything according to His will, He hears us (and He CAN do something about it). Do you trust God?