

PRAYER AND PROVIDENCE

By Jon Quinn

The word "providence" is derived from the Latin word "providentia" and simply means "foresight". We use this word to denote God's wisdom and power as He governs and preserves the world toward the goal of fulfilling His purpose. The things God does, or arranges to be done, according to His purpose, and by His power and wisdom, is "providence".

Whether it be the discovery of America, the invention of the printing press, Aunt Martha pulling through her automobile accident, or a series of incidents which led to someone hearing the gospel, what many may refer to as "luck" may not be luck at all. The Psalmist discusses the role of God's providence in the course of nations whereby He insures that His purpose succeeds while the counsel of nations fail (Psa.33:6-12). Providence also is at work in the life of the individual, and in a very special way for those who live righteously (Psa.37:7-11).

God exercises His providence over the whole world. He provides for all of the creatures of the earth, and for all men, good or evil, those things which are necessary to sustain life (Matt.5:45). Beyond this, He gives special gifts to His children (Matt.7:11).

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PROVIDENCE AND MIRACLES

"How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard. God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His will." (Heb.2:3-4).

The miracles of the Lord, as well as His apostles and prophets, were for the purpose of confirming the words that they spoke, proving them to be from God. These miracles were "signs" confirming that these men spoke the truth.

This purpose has been accomplished, the word has been delivered and authenticated. The purpose of miracles, established by God's will, is therefore fulfilled. This is why they have ceased (1 Cor.13:8-10). While we may expect God to act in powerful ways, we do not expect miracles, for He has informed us that their time and purpose is past. A miracle is a specific kind of providence; it is God working in an obvious way, superseding the laws of nature in observable fashion, to produce evidence that the words being spoken are indeed from God. Not all of God's providence is equally observable, but it is still powerful. God certainly works through the laws of nature, influences them, supersedes them and so forth to alter the course of events, perhaps as a response to prayer, but such activity is not a miracle if it does not function as a "sign".

A COUPLE OF EXAMPLES:

- a). **Jonah:** God used the laws of nature, influencing them to bring about a storm on the Great Sea, putting the ship upon which Jonah traveled in peril. A storm at sea is not a sign, because storms happen at sea in the normal course of events. This one would not have happened apart from God, but still it is not a miracle in that you would not be able to distinguish it from a storm not sent by God (Jonah 1:4-17). Now, the miracle of living in a fish's belly for three days is another matter!
- b). **Jesus & Samuel:** Here we have two births. Both were a result of God's intervention, but only one was a miracle. Samuel was born because the Lord intervened, worked within the confines of natural law, allowing nature to take its course through the husband/wife relationship Hannah had with her husband. But Jesus had no human father; so this is a miracle. Neither Samuel nor Jesus would have been born apart from God's intervention, but only one was conceived apart from the laws of nature (1 Sam.1:19-20; Matt.1:18-25). Will God grant the birth of a son to a "Hannah" today and give her a "Samuel"? Of course, if such is according to His will. But will He grant a miraculous conception like Jesus'? No, He will not.

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PRAYER AND PROVIDENCE

"...how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!"
(Matthew 7:11) In the context, Jesus is talking about God providing answers to His children's prayers. The New Testament shows plainly that prayers of righteous men and women do influence God's actions in some

circumstances. We are encouraged to pray to a providing God who cares, listens and is capable and willing to take action. There is a "cause and effect" relationship between prayer and some providence.

- a) God gives good gifts to those who ask Him ([Matt.7:7-11](#)). This means God does something for those who ask that He does not do for those who do not.
- b) Prayer was encouraged for Paul's deliverance and service (Romans 15:30,31).
- c) Paul expected deliverance "through" the prayers of the saints and the provision of the Lord ([Phil.1:19-20](#)).
- d) We are encouraged to make our requests be made known unto God. The first thing to be derived from such is "peace". ([Phil.4:6,7](#)).
- e) We are to pray for God to open doors ([Col.4:3-4](#)).
- f) We are to pray for the spiritual well-being of others ([Col.4:12](#)).
- g) Prayer helps! ([2 Cor.1:8-11](#)).
- h) We are told that the prayers of a righteous man can be very effective ([Jas.5:16-17](#)).

Conditional Providence

"...yet not as I will, but as Thou wilt..." - ([Matt.26:39](#)). We have noticed above some of the conditions related to God's providence. We may inadvertently ask for things which, unknown to us, work against some higher purpose of God. That was why Jesus gave us the example of putting the Father's will first, even before what we may consider to be very important requests. An excellent example of this would be the apostle Paul, who asked for something that looked good, but God knew that in the long run, it wasn't - ([2 Cor.12:7-10](#)). Paul's 'thorn in the flesh' had a positive role to fulfill which Paul had not been aware of when he had asked for its removal.

God's wisdom must be respected at all times. Paul would make his plans and desires subservient to God's sometimes unseen purposes. He might promise to return to Ephesus "if God wills" ([Acts 18:20-21](#); cf. [1 Cor.4:19](#)). We must always understand that God may not provide that for which we ask for this reason.

HAVE YOU GOT IT ALL FIGURED OUT YET?

"The secret things belong unto the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever; that we may observe all the words of this law. ([Deut.9:29](#)).

We continue to trust and pray and accept the circumstances that come our way. We live by faith. We know that whatever God does or does not do, that He has our best interests at heart. The wise man said that there "is a time for everything" in God's plan. But he also said that he was not competent enough to put it all together and trying to figure it all out was futility (see [Eccl.3:1-8, 10-11](#); [7:15, 23-24](#); [8:14, 16, 17](#); [12:13-14](#) for lots to think about on this subject). When Habakkuk questioned God's providence on a specific occasion (the judgment of His people through the Babylonians), the Lord essentially told him to take care of his business (to live by faith) and the Lord would take care of His (to bring things to where they need to be) (see [Habakkuk 1:2-4, 12-14](#); [2:4](#)).

Yes, God answers prayers. He works today. His hand is in our lives. We have faith that wherever life leads, He still rules and will bring about His purposes ([Rev.4:1-3, 9-11](#)).

Jon Quinn co-editor of Expository Files
1547 E Broadway jwquinn@keynet.net
Bradley, IL 60915 <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/1681>
Date: Thu, 02 May 1996 12:47:51 -0500
From: Jon Quinn <jwquinn@keynet.net>