

# Providence

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## ***What is providence?***

Providence is a word deriving from a Latin word meaning “foresight.” While not found explicitly in the Bible, the concept certainly is. God, through His infinite foreknowledge (Ps. 139:1-4; 147:5), knows this world and the course of human history from beginning to end. And through His infinite power (Rev. 19:6), He is able to interact in the affairs of life, behind the scenes, in order to provide for His creation, and bring about His will.

## ***Types of Providence***

There are three basic types of divine providence described in the Bible:

- 1) *Natural providence* – God provides for and sustains the natural order (Ps. 104:14; Ecc. 11:5; Matt. 10:29; Acts 14:17; Heb. 1:3)
- 2) *Political providence* – God provides for nations through some type of supernatural intervention behind the scenes (Dan. 4:17; Ex. 9:16; cf. Dan. 10:13; 2 Kings 6:16-17).
- 3) *Individual providence* – God provides for individuals through some type of supernatural intervention behind the scenes.
  - a) Opportunities to seek Him (Jer. 29:13; Acts 17:26-28; Philemon 15-16)
  - b) Those who trust (Pr. 3:5-6; Jer. 10:23)
  - c) Works things out for good (Rom. 8:28; cf. Gen. 22:8)
  - d) Provides for needs (Phi. 4:19; Matt. 6:33; Ps. 37:25)
  - e) Provides way of escaping sin (1 Cor. 10:13)
  - f) Through prayer (Matt. 7:7-8; 1 Jn. 5:14; Phi. 4:6)

## ***How Providence Works***

God's providence, in our individual lives, is seen from our perspective through opportunities and our reactions to those opportunities (Esther 4:14; Acts 17:26-28). However, just how these present themselves is a mystery (Deut. 29:29; Rom. 11:33; angels involved, cf. Heb. 1:14; Dan. 10:13; 2 Kings 6:17-17).

What appears to some to be nothing but “time and chance” or pure “luck” could be God working behind the scenes. We say “could be” because providence is typically only seen in hindsight. Only after a number of events have unfolded can we reflect back and see God's hand in the matter. While the chain of events are unfolding, we can only ask, as Mordecai did, “Who knows...?” (Esther 4:14), but in the end, we can often look back like Joseph and say “God sent me...” (Gen. 45:5-8) and “God meant it for good” (Gen. 50:20).

### ***Discussion Questions***

- 1) What is the difference between providence and miracles (Acts 4:16; cf. Mk. 16:20; 1 Cor. 13:8-10)?
- 2) Does God predetermine opportunities we have (Acts 17:26-27)? What about our actions?
- 3) If God's purpose will be accomplished no matter what, why should we get involved (Esther 4:14)?
- 4) Can we know when God's providence is at work (Gen. 45:5-8)?
- 5) Are there times we don't think God is at work and He is? Are there times when we think God is at work and He is not?
- 6) Should we thank God if good is done to us? (1 Thes. 5:18) Is it possible to receive a blessing apart from God's providence (Jas. 1:17)?
- 7) Is it possible to receive hardship as a result of God's providence? Apart from it? (Jas. 1:2-3; Heb. 12:3-11; 1 Pet. 1:7; Rev. 2:10)
- 8) If everything that happens to us affects the course of our lives in some way, is everything that happens to us the result of God causing or allowing it?
- 9) If God knows everything, why do we pray (Matt. 6:8)? Does the Bible teach that prayer is beneficial? (Jas. 5:16)
- 10) Can a prayer actually cause God to act, or would He have acted regardless of the prayer?
- 11) Can a prayer change His will (1 Jn. 5:14)?
- 12) Compare the Biblical concept of providence with the concepts of deism, pantheism, and pre-determinism.