

## God's Providence #2

**Review:** Providence is God's activity as the omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent Creator, whereby He

1. Directs, sustains, preserves, and provides for all his creation, from galaxies to electrons
2. Directs all things to the ultimate conclusion of his sovereign will and purpose.

God's providence is contrasted with deism, pantheism, and fate. God is in control of all things, bad as well as good, yet is in no way the cause of evil, or the author of sin. It means that men will choose to do what we do, preserving our moral responsibility, yet do unknowingly and unfailingly fulfill his ultimate purpose.

Our challenge is to understand how divine sovereignty and human responsibility can both be true.

It has been said that **God's providence is best seen in the rearview mirror**. In the present, we do not and cannot see God's ultimate purpose. It is only when we look back, that we can see how God was working.

We are studying God's providence by stories – some from scripture, and some from history. We are looking mainly at the second part of the definition of Providence, God's directing of all things to accomplish His ultimate purpose, often by what unbelievers call "coincidence", "fortune", or "luck".

Story #1: Joseph in Egypt, Gen. 37-50

Story #2: "A Dollar and Seventy-seven Cents" in 70 Years of Miracles by Richard Harvey, pp. 35-38

### **Story #3: Preservation of the Baby Moses (Ex. 2)**

Pharaoh had ordered the death of all the Hebrew male babies, and it was actually being carried out, but Moses' parents did what they could to keep him secret. After awhile he was becoming impossible to hide, so his mother prepared an "ark" (basket) of reeds made waterproof with pitch, and set it into the Nile. As his older sister watched, the ark was discovered by Pharaoh's daughter. Recognizing the situation, she nevertheless decided to save the baby and raise it as her own, thus allowing the deliverer of the Hebrews to be raised in the very household of his people's oppressor!

**Questions:** How was it that Pharaoh's daughter "just happened" to be there at the same time, and "just happened" to see the ark in the rushes? What caused her to have mercy on him and even take him as her own son? If she had the heart of a Jezebel, she would have had him killed according to her father's orders. What caused Pharaoh to allow this? He surely must have known the circumstances of the child's finding. The one exception to his edict, in time, became the very thing Pharaoh feared (the leader of an uprising).

Why did Pharaoh make his edict? Why did the Egyptian midwives not kill the babies? Why had the Hebrews not assimilated into Egyptian culture, but were instead forced into slavery?

**Answer:** It was God, working in every circumstance to raise up a deliverer of his people. He wanted to bring his people out of Egypt, which would not have happened if their lives had not been made so miserable, or if they just "became Egyptians". Also, he knew they would need a leader, and that man was to be Moses.

### **Story #4: Preservation of Paul (Ac. 23:11-22)**

When Paul was under arrest in Jerusalem, a group of 40 Jews made a pact among themselves not to eat or drink until they had killed him. They got the chief priests and elders to agree to call him up for questioning the next day, so they could attack him on the way. But "it just so happened" that Paul's nephew overheard what was happening, and told Paul, and then the chief captain, who was keeping Paul prisoner. When the chief captain heard this, he thought "this situation is getting too hot" so he called two centurions and told them to take Paul to Felix the governor in Caesarea immediately (in the middle of the night), guarded by 200 regular soldiers, 70 horsemen, and 200 spearmen.

I always wondered how long those 40 men went hungry before they gave up, but I doubt they persisted to the death. How was it that the plan was overheard? How was it that it was Paul's nephew? How was it that he was able to get in to see Paul and the chief captain in time to thwart the plot? God had determined that Paul would go to Rome (v. 11), so he made sure that their plot was exposed.

### **Story #5: War of 1812 – the Burning of Washington DC**

Andrew Jackson and the Miracle of New Orleans by Brian Kilmeade, chapter 5

A large fleet of British warships had been sighted in Chesapeake Bay, and it was obvious that an invasion was imminent, but the Americans didn't know where. They thought Washington would be safe because it didn't have much strategic military value. But the British landed and attacked a small town about 8 miles away. Even though the Americans had a 7000-to-4000 advantage, the British went through them fairly easily, and headed for Washington. President Madison saw what was happening from an overlook, and his party fled back to Washington. They had only enough time to save a few things like a portrait of George Washington and a copy of the Declaration of Independence, and joined the retreat from the city. When the British came to the President's house, there was still warm food on the table. They ate the food and drank the wine and then set the house on fire. They proceeded to burn the city, but before it could totally destroy everything,

“Only the arrival, with miraculous timing, of a powerful storm prevented more of the city from being damaged by the flames. Rain poured down, and strong winds blew, lifting British cannons off the ground ... Whatever the case the British were discouraged and the fires quenched thanks not to the work of men, but to an act of God.”

Why did God allow the destruction at all? It caused Americans who previously were ambivalent, to “get on board” the war effort, because they saw that the British intent was not just victory, but destruction.

### **Story #6: War of 1812 – Deliverance of Fort Bowyer (Mobile, Alabama)**

Andrew Jackson and the Miracle of New Orleans by Brian Kilmeade, chapter 6

After the fall of Washington, the British wanted to take New Orleans. As part of this campaign, they intended to establish a hold in Mobile, from which they could move on land towards New Orleans. The British made their appearance before Jackson's men could make adequate preparations, and there were only 158 men in Fort Bowyer (on Mobile Point, about 30 miles from Mobile), to defend against 4 British warships (78 guns) at sea, and a force of British, Creeks, and Choctaws on land behind them. They were outnumbered about 10 to one.

As General Jackson was heading to the fort on a schooner to inspect their preparations, someone came and notified him that it was too late – the British were already in place for the battle. He had to turn back. If he had not been warned, he would have been captured, and British victory assured.

As the warships got into position, the Americans in the fort were making good cannon shots, but it appeared to be just a matter of time before they ran out of ammunition. But then “a lucky shot” sent a cannon ball through the anchor cable of the warship *Hermes*, setting it free in the current to drift toward the fort. It was getting shot up pretty well before the sailors could get it tuned around, but then it hit bottom and got stuck, making it a stationary target only 600 yards from the fort. The sailors set fire to the ship before fleeing to the other ships. Eventually the fire reached the gunpowder in the hold and the ship exploded. The other ships left. The fort at Mobile Point was kept out of British control, which ultimately kept them from getting New Orleans.

So we see through all these stories that God has a plan, and he works in marvellous ways to make sure that plan is carried out. His providence is seen, not just in spontaneous, individual actions, but in chains of events that can be traced backwards for years.

The lesson is that we should be looking for God's hand of providence in our own lives, the life of our local church, our nation, and history. Whatever God allows us to recognize in his past acts of providence should awaken us to a living faith that in our present and future circumstances, he has us in his hands. Even if we cannot see it yet, we are to believe that his provident hand is guiding us. Nothing takes him by surprise, and all the things we are now going through will somehow be worked for our good, if we love God and are truly “his called”. Rom. 8:28