

# God and Providence: Providence, Prayers, or Miracles?

Lesson Three (Conclusion)

# Providence Or Prayer?

- Prayer and divine providence are closely related, so close that they are difficult to separate.
- Prayer is the request of man to God to act on behalf of the one who prays.
- Prayer is an expression of our belief that God will hear us as individuals, and it testifies that we believe He loves us individually will answer our individual petitions.

# Providence Or Prayer?

- 1John 5:14-15 - “Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. 15 And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.”
- James 1:5-8 - “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. 6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”

# Providence Or Prayer?

- “While God's ultimate purposes, are unchangeable, His immediate will is flexible and open to change through the prayers of his people. A personal God, Who loves and cares, can be solicited in prayer. Prayer works because God makes Himself attentive to and open to responding to the requests of his children” (*Donald Bloesch, Essentials of Evangelical Theology [Harper & Row, 1978, vol. 2, p. 57, & vol. 1, p. 31]*)
- “Prayer changes events and circumstances, not merely the one praying. No one should succumb to the error of viewing prayers as simply a means of changing the individual and his attitudes rather than changing events, circumstances, and history itself. Certainly prayer changes me: my outlook, orientation, and attitudes. But prayer also changes those situations and circumstances of life which are distinctly separated from any change which may take place in the individual who prays” (*Harold Lindsell, “When You Pray” [Tyndale, 1969], p. 11*).

# Providence Or Prayer?

- Providence is our conviction that God will take care of all of His creation apart from our prayers, and that in particular He will take care of us as His children apart from our prayers.
  - Psalm 37:23-25 - “The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD, And He delights in his way.  
24 Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; For the LORD upholds him with His hand.  
25 I have been young, and now am old; Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, Nor his descendants begging bread.”

# Providence Or Prayer?

- Matt. 6:25-30 - “Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? 28 So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; 29 and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?”

# Providence Or Prayer?

- There is a relationship between providence and prayer.
- The place where both prayer and providence meet is in our faith:
  - Phil. 4:4-7 - “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. 6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”
  - 1Peter 5:7 - “Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you”

# Providence Or Miracle?

- The English word "miracle" comes from the Latin word "miraculum," meaning to marvel or wonder.
- English definition would be any phenomenon, whether supernatural or natural, that causes one to marvel or wonder.
- Our usage of miracle to describe a great natural event or an unlikely occurrence has created this misunderstanding of Bible miracles, for the Bible does not use miracle to characterize natural or unlikely events.



# Providence Or Miracle?

- The Bible's definition of miracle comes from the Greek word "dunamis." It means "power, inherent ability, used of works of a supernatural origin and character, such as could not be produced by natural agents and means" (Vines).
- Semeion is "a sign, a mark, a token" (Vines). "A sign, portent, or unusual occurrence that transcends the common course of nature; miracles and wonders by which men prove that the cause they are pleading is God's" (Thayers).
- Teras is translated "wonders." "A prodigy, miracle, or wonder causing the beholder to marvel" (Thayer).
- The Bible's usage of miracle is supernatural event performed by God to confirm His word.

# Providence Or Miracle?

- The Old Testament teaches that miracles were used to reveal and authenticate the revelation of spiritual truth.
  - Exodus 4:1-9, 29-31 - Moses.
  - 1Kings 18:36-39 - Elijah on Mt. Carmel.
  - Dan. 3:28-29 - The three in the furnace.
  - Dan. 5:21-22 - The handwriting on the wall.

# Providence Or Miracle?

- The New Testament teaching is that miracles were used to confirm the truth.
  - John 10:37-38, 20:30-31; Heb. 2:2-4
- Miracles were not performed for personal benefit, period.
  - 2Cor. 12:7-10; 2Tim. 4:20
- Miracles have ended with the end of revelation

# Providence Or Miracle?

- Does their experience that they call a miracle fit the purpose of miracles: to reveal and confirm truth?
  - It could not, for all truth has been revealed - Jude 3
  - Any new revelation is a false doctrine - Gal. 1:8-9.
  - If their miracle was not to reveal and confirm truth, then it was not a miracle.

# Providence Or Miracle?

- Does the experience they call a miracle fit the Bible's criteria for miracles?
  - Visible to others? They have to be explained to others.
  - Immediate? Actually occurs at the rate of natural events.
  - Infallible? Every single one can be debated.
  - Investigable? Impossible to present proof.
  - Since the event cannot meet the Bible's definition of miracle, it was not a miracle.

# Providence Or Miracle?

- "If there are no more Bible miracles happening, how do you explain what happened to me?"
  - Providence. God has provided for us through means of His divinely ordained spiritual and natural laws and by way of answered prayers.
  - The actual vehicle of Providence can be guessed at or believed in, but not proven by limited human understanding.
  - Miracles do not happen today, but Providence does.

# Providence Or Miracle?

- Dividing providence from miracles
  - Both have a supernatural origin: GOD.
  - Both are part of the care God has shown for His people.
  - Miracles are no longer with us today; God's providence is.
- Difference between them is in the agencies through which they operate
  - Miracles come through supernatural means.
  - Providence comes through Divinely ordained law: spiritual law, natural laws, and answered prayers based on God's promise to care for His creation and His children

# Providence: Neither Prayers Nor Miracles

- Can one know when providence has operated?
  - We do not know for certain and cannot know for fact.
  - The only way we know that God operated providentially is where it is revealed in the Bible that He worked through some other means.
- As there is no Divine revelation today, we cannot know for certain when or how He has operated.
  - We can think we know or have a conviction by faith, but it cannot be proven beyond the fact that God has promised to help us, and we believe in His care for us.



# Providence: Neither Prayers Nor Miracles

- Our part is not to figure out how and when God has worked, but to believe that He does work
  - Ecc. 3:11 - “He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.”
  - Deut. 29:29 - “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”

# Providence: Neither Prayers Nor Miracles

- "The impossibility of empirical proof of the providential operation of God is a spiritual necessity. A man who knew empirically that an event had been caused by his prayer would feel like a magician. His head would be turned and his heart corrupted. The Christian is not to ask whether this or that event happened because of his prayer. He is rather to believe that events are answers to prayer, whether they are grantings or refusals. He must believe that the prayers of all concerned and their needs have been taken into account" (*Miracles*, C. S. Lewis, p. 180).

# The Comfort Of Providence

- God still is in control and works in our world through providence: the operation of spiritual law, natural law, and answered prayers.
- We must believe that God does care and has provided for us to accomplish His divine will.
- From this faith, the Christian can draw comfort and strength in this life.

# The Comfort Of Providence

- 1Peter 5:6-11 - “Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, 7 casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. 8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. 9 Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. 10 But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. 11 To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.”