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# BIBLE TALK

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This the question is: **What is providence and can I know when it is happening?**

The scriptures teach that God is sovereign and in full control of all things that occur on earth.

## **1 Chronicles 29:11-12**

<sup>11</sup> Yours, O LORD, is the greatness, The power and the glory, The victory and the majesty; For all that is in heaven and in earth is Yours; Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, And You are exalted as head over all.

<sup>12</sup> Both riches and honor come from You, And You reign over all. In Your hand is power and might; In Your hand it is to make great And to give strength to all.

According to this, then, God is in full control of the world. In His government of the world, God uses three methods to see that His will is carried out:

### **1) Natural means**

### **2) Providential means**

### **3) Miraculous means**

When God uses natural means to carry out His will, it simply means He operates thru natural laws that were set in motion from the beginning of the creation.

- God uses natural laws of evaporation, wind, rain, and dew to water the earth and care for both plant and animal life (Isa 55:10).
- God uses natural laws of reproduction to produce new plants, animals, and people (Gen 1:22, 28).
- When a man prays the Lord's prayer and says, "*Give us this day our daily bread,*" God answers that prayer thru natural means. The man must go out, find a job, work hard, and buy his bread (Gen 3:19). When a man has done this, God has answered his prayer thru natural means and the man should bless and thank God for giving him bread (Mt 15:36).

In contrast to natural means, God sometimes uses providential means to carry out His will. This means God superintends the course of events in order to assure that His will is carried out.

- In Genesis 37, when Joseph's brothers were about to kill him, God arranged things so that a caravan of Midianite traders passed by at just the right time. The brothers sold Joseph as a slave rather than killing him.
- In Genesis 39, God arranged things so that Potiphar, the captain of the guards, took notice of Joseph and bought him from the Midianites.
- Later in Genesis 39, God arranged the course of events so that Joseph was falsely accused and thrown into prison. But as you will discover by reading Genesis 40-45, this was God's way of eventually exalting Joseph to ruler of the land, second only Pharaoh himself.

When Joseph's brothers, who had sold him for a slave, came to Egypt to buy grain, they discovered their own brother Joseph was ruler of all Egypt. Listen to Joseph's explanation of what happened:

### **Genesis 45:5-8**

<sup>5</sup> "But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life.

<sup>6</sup> "For these two years the famine has been in the land, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting.

<sup>7</sup> "And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

<sup>8</sup> "So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.

So God, by providence, arranged the course of events so that His intended will was carried out. It was God's will that Joseph become ruler of Egypt, so He used the hatred of the brothers, and the Midianite traders in just the right way so that Joseph was brought to Egypt. Later God again used the jealousy of a husband and the dreams of a king to exalt Joseph to ruler of all Egypt.

**Q:** Can God work in this same way today?

**A:** The answer of course is yes, God can work this way today. Unlike miraculous power which would end upon the completion of the New Testament scriptures (1 Cor 13:8-12), providence is never said to have an end. However, before one can say for certain that providence has indeed occurred, a direct revelation from God is necessary. In other words, God must directly say, "*This is providence*," before we may say providence has actually occurred.

Mordecai believed that perhaps Esther was exalted as queen in order to save the Jews, but he could not say for sure that it was providence because he did not have a direct revelation from heaven saying it was.

### **Esther 4:14**

<sup>14</sup> ... Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

Here Mordecai admitted that God's providence may have been at work in the life of Esther, but he did not know for sure. He allowed for the possibility of mere chance. It may have been just a coincident that Esther became queen, and because Mordecai did not have direct revelation, he could not say for sure.

## **SUMMARY**

In summary, then, these Bible passages teach us several things:

- 1) We learn that God is so sovereign that He can superintend and direct the course of human events. God is so sovereign that He sometimes uses even evil men, without their knowledge, to shape the course of events so they turn out the way He desires (Isa 10:5-12).
- 2) We learn that no one can confidently assert that providence is being exercised without a direct revelation from God, and the scriptures clearly teach that direct revelation has ceased (1 Cor 13:8-12).
- 3) We learn also that we should make the most of the opportunities that lie before us - for perhaps God has indeed arranged things so that we have an opportunity to obey Him and do His will (Esther 4:14).

I hope these thoughts will be of help to you in your own personal study of the scriptures.

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

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