

## **Providence**

Acts 10:1-48 & Acts 11:1-18

Do you ever ponder the **providence** of God?

Providence means God's governance or management of His creation.

We say, "Nothing just happens." But do we really believe that God is the first cause of everything? It is true that God uses secondary means and what we call "circumstances" but ultimately God's purpose is in front of, behind, under and over, and around everything

Next question; do you believe in **predestination**?

Sad to say most people who claim to be Christians in our day do not believe that before the Creation of everything that is not God, that God predetermined that you will be born, the place of your birth, who your parents are, and the seemingly unimportant events in your life that will eventually lead to your hearing the Gospel and, if you are indeed saved, that God took the initiative and that your so-called free-will was not the determinate factor in your being justified.

It is popular in many Baptist churches to think in terms of a person having a "chance" to be saved. The purpose behind the "invitation" at the end of a sermon; raise your hand, walk the aisle, or just to do something, is to see some results. It doesn't seem to matter that the great majority of people who "do something" cannot be found in regular church attendance a few years after they were "saved." More than once I have had someone say to me after preaching, "You did not give an invitation so no one had a chance to be saved." Well, I aim to show to you from the Bible that salvation is not an accident or by chance.

Think with me: Why are we here in this particular place at this certain time?

To worship God is, of course, the answer.

But may I ask another question: How do we worship God?

We believe that this Book we call the Bible, is an accurate translation from Hebrew and Greek, and it is God's word in written form. We do not make an idol out of paper and ink, but we do regard these writings as authoritative over every aspect of our life and they are sufficient for our conviction of sin, our knowledge of God, how we may be saved, how we relate to one another, how we organize a local church, and how we worship God.

But another question arises. Who is God?

The Jews say they worship God, but then they say that the promised Messiah of the Scriptures has not yet come into the world.

Islam reveres Allah, but they deny that Jesus of Nazareth is very God.

New Age adherents say that everything is God.

Postmodernists say, among other things, that there is no objective truth, such as the Bible, and that all religions are equally valid and that no religion at all is just as good.

The God of this Bible has revealed Himself in creation to the extent that every person who is cognizant is responsible to know that **God is**. We are not told how God deals with imbeciles and idiots. It is enough that God is just and holy and that the secret things belong to His own counsel.

The God of this Bible has revealed Himself in the Person of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And in this Bible, we have the record of His Son, and that by repenting of our sin, and believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, by grace alone, we have eternal life in His name.

“For the Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand. He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”  
John 3:35-36

That being said, I want to use this Bible to proclaim how God influences and controls circumstances in our lives to accomplish His purpose.

The doctrine is called the **Providence of God or Glorious Predestination**.

Providence simply means that God is in total and absolute control of His creation, including the minutest details. God has so ordered and predetermined affairs and events so that that God controls everything and yet man is responsible for his sinful acts.

Predestination is included in God's Providence but has to do with the justification of individuals. If that truth gives you a tinge of resentment may I encourage you to read this Bible and see if these things I say are according to Scripture? It is very well for you to disagree with a mere man, as I am, but it is quite another matter to be found resisting God.

First we will lay the foundation of the doctrine of predestination. You surely know what the first three chapters of the Book of Ephesians teach. Turn to chapter one.

Ephesians 1:1-14

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God,  
to the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus:  
2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus  
Christ.

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has  
blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in  
Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the  
world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5  
having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to  
Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of  
the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the  
Beloved.

7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of  
sins, according to the riches of His grace 8 which He made to  
abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, 9 having made known  
to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which  
He purposed in Himself,

10 that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth — in Him. 11 In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, 12 that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

13 In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory. NKJV

We could talk about how Joseph was “lucky” enough to escape from the pit his brothers had put him in planning later to kill him; how a caravan “accidentally” came by just in time for his brothers to sell him into slavery.

The story goes on to find Joseph on the throne of Egypt with his brothers and his father Jacob bowing before him fulfilling the prophecy of Joseph’s dreams.

Read the story of Joseph in Genesis 37 to 50 and see how God arranged every event and controlled even the wicked acts of Joseph’s brothers.

What was Joseph’s inspired conclusion?

Genesis 50:15-21

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "Perhaps Joseph will hate us, and may actually repay us for all the evil which we did to him." 16 So they sent messengers to Joseph, saying, "Before your father died he commanded, saying, 17'Thus you shall say to Joseph: "I beg you, please forgive the trespass of your brothers and their sin; for they did evil to you.'" Now, please, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of your father." And Joseph wept when they spoke to him.

18 Then his brothers also went and fell down before his face, and they said, "Behold, we are your servants."

19 Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? 20 **But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.** 21 Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them. NKJV

The doctrine of predestination is throughout the entire Bible. Does not the record tell us in Acts 2:22-24 about the most wicked act that man ever committed being in God's providence?

22 "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know — 23 Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; 24 whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it. NKJV

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With that as a foundation let's look at a set of circumstances recorded in Acts 10 & 11:

While God is keeping the universe in balance, the stars in place, our sun at just the right distance from the earth, the grass and trees alive, causing the rain to fall on the just and the unjust, keeping the rivers flowing, determining the fall of a sparrow, keeping up with the hairs on your head, and yes - keeping heaven glorious and hell hot - He has the time and capacity to visit His mercy and grace on a Gentile centurion named Cornelius.

God is not stressed or strained to do what He does without loss of power or energy. A mighty act of God does not diminish Him in any degree.

In Acts 10 we have recorded the first occasion of Gentiles entering into the kingdom of God, being born again, without first becoming Jews!

The Old Testament examples of Gentile believers being saved such as Rahab the Harlot, Ruth the Moabite, Naaman the Syrian, et al essentially accepted the God of Israel and became proselytes to the Judaism.

This record in Acts 10 and 11 is about a major event in the history of the church! The writer of Acts, Dr. Luke, gives it two chapters; Cornelius' experience is listed four times.

Try to grasp the "coincidence" {nothing happens by random chance} of the timing of the events: If you will, "A Tale of Three Cities."

Joppa, Caesarea, and Jerusalem

Imagine an isosceles triangle with its three points with Caesarea at the top, Joppa is 30 miles to the south; Jerusalem 36 miles east of Joppa, and then 64 miles from Jerusalem northwest to Caesarea.

Peter, a Jew, is at **Joppa** {9:43} staying with Simon a tanner, "days enough."

Cornelius, a Gentile, is at **Caesarea**, a seaport 30 miles north of Joppa, the home of Pilate, Felix, and Festus.

**Jerusalem**, the center of Judaism, is the birthplace of the Christian Church.

Read and comment on Acts 10:1-48

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You must see how God arranged for Cornelius [Gentile] to call for Peter [Jew] and how God prepared Peter to respond to the call to go to Cornelius.

Unless God had taught Peter that He [God] does not show partiality in the justification of individuals, Peter would never have come to Cornelius.

## Circumstances

In my personal testimony of how the Lord saved me, and without relating the entire account, God used my interest in the guitar. While I was living in Atlanta [1964] I began to study guitar, then my company transferred us to Birmingham. In Birmingham a clerk in my office told me that her uncle, was a classical guitarist and that he knew a guitar teacher.

By “coincidence,” there was a preacher who was taking lessons from the same teacher. After some time, my guitar teacher told me that the preacher could preach as well as he could play the guitar. God used my curiosity to get me to go to a place where the Gospel was being preached. There is a lot more to the story, but my point is how God arranges “circumstances.”

How did God arrange the “coincidences” in your life that led you to faith in Jesus Christ?

In Acts 10, we see how Peter and Cornelius were prepared by God to understand one of the great truths of the Word of God:

There is One God and One Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Any person, Jew or Gentile, whatever their race, sex, or whatever their station in life, if indeed they are saved, are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ by the grace of God.

As already mentioned, this is the first instance of Gentiles coming to faith in Christ without first becoming Jews. These dramatic events are called by some the “Gentile Pentecost.” {Cf. Acts 2}

After the events in Cornelius’ house in Caesarea, Peter went to Jerusalem to announce the great news that the Gospel was spreading and that even the Gentiles were being saved!

Read and comment on Acts 11:1-18:

Let me conclude with some observations:

Being religious is not the same as being saved. Nicodemus was very religious when he came to see Jesus [John 3], but like the other Pharisees, Sadducees, priests, scribes, rulers, and yes, Cornelius, a good man, were religious and lost! Among the Jews there were very few that believed that Jesus of Nazareth was Messiah.

Here is the lesson. The Gospel is for all kinds of people. There is only one salvation that is true and that is only in trusting Jesus Christ completely. It is not Jesus and your decision; Jesus and your baptism; Jesus and your good works; Jesus and your church membership; it is only through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

If there is a shred of self-righteousness mixed with your faith it will condemn you. Jesus Christ is the sufficient Savior.

How do you "get saved?" Receive the free gift of God!

Has God included you in those He ordained to eternal life?  
How can you know?

Repent and believe in the Gospel.

**AMAZING GRACE, HOW SWEET THE SOUND, THAT SAVED A  
WRETCH LIKE ME, I ONCE WAS LOST, BUT NOW I'M FOUND,  
WAS BLIND BUT NOW I SEE!**

What should you do? Not "in order to" be saved, but because you are saved, make a public profession of faith in Jesus as Lord and Saviour and submit to believers' baptism.

There may be those here today that have assurance that they trust Christ but they need to join a local church that preaches the truth about God without apology.



Why do you delay? Salvation is not in the public confession; nor in the membership in a local church; but God has given us clear instruction on being obedient to His Word.

Will you encourage us today by telling us what God has done for you?

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June 21, 1989 {Acts 10}; June 25, 1989 {Acts 11}  
June 24, 1992 {Acts 10}; July 1, 1992 {Acts 11}  
June 28, 1998 {combined the two messages}  
June 11, 2000  
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