

# Providence

## Introduction to the life of David Pt.4: God sends Saul to Samuel 1 Samuel 9:1-16

Summary: Providence is God’s purposeful control over all things. God sent Saul by means of natural, mundane circumstances. Passages like that teach us how to see God in life without a narrator. Providence is more astonishing than miracles and God is just as much at work in quiet as in loud providence. We should pay attention to and enjoy providence because 1) It is an aspect of fellowship with God that is available 24/7, 2) It fills every part of life with meaning, 3) It carries us through suffering, 4) It defeats numerous sins, 5) It gives us hope and joy in the final destination of this “river.”

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**1 Samuel 9:16 About this time tomorrow I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin. Anoint him leader over my people Israel**

**1 Samuel 9:3-4 Now the donkeys belonging to Saul's father Kish were lost, and Kish said to his son Saul, "Take one of the servants with you and go and look for the donkeys." <sup>4</sup> So he passed through the hill country of Ephraim and through the area around Shalisha, but they did not find them. They went on into the district of Shaalim, but the donkeys were not there. Then he passed through the territory of Benjamin, but they did not find them.**

## Introduction

We are in the midst of a study of 1 Samuel, and we left off last time in chapter eight and nine where Israel rejects God as their king and asks for a human king like all the other nations have. They wanted someone to deliver them from their enemies without having to bother with being committed to God. So God warned them about the terrible things that would happen to them if they followed through on this course, and that in spite of all those hardships that go along with having a king they would still not get what they really wanted, because even with a king they would still have to be committed to God in order to be safe from their enemies, and their answer to God was: “No!” They rejected God’s warning. So God punished them by answering their prayer and giving them what they most desired. He gave them tall, impressive, godless, inept Saul.

But before we move on to chapter ten, there is one more very important theme we need to see in chapter nine. This theme is crucial not only for understanding this book, but most of the Old Testament as well. And it is also crucial for understanding the nature of God and for living the Christian life. It is the doctrine of providence. “Providence is a word that does not appear anywhere in the Bible in

reference to God, like the words “Trinity” or “Bible” or “The Sovereignty of God”, and yet it is a *major* theme in Scripture. In fact, one entire book is dedicated to showcasing it (Esther). The reason the word does not appear in Scripture is the same reason “Trinity” does not appear – because it is a word we have come up with as shorthand to describe not a doctrine, but a set of doctrines.

## **Definition: Control + Purpose**

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia defines providence as “that preservation, care, and government which God exercises over all things ... in order that they may accomplish the ends for which they were created.” God’s providence is God accomplishing all His purposes by means of all that takes place in His creation. God controls absolutely everything, and uses all of it to bring about His perfect plan.

## **God Controls Everything**

Now I know that the first part of that – the part about God controlling everything - raises questions for many people. One reason it raises questions is because it is beyond human understanding how God could control everything and there still be such a thing as free will on the part of humans. I believe humans do have free will. If they didn’t, it would be misleading for Scripture to talk about free will offerings, for one thing. Man does have free will. Man does have the capacity to choose Coke or Pepsi. But once you make your choice, it is also true that God was in full control of the outcome of your decision making, just like He is in full control of everything else that ever happens.

**Ps.135:6 The LORD does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths**

**Dan.4:35 He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?"**

**Eph.1:11 we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will**

**Isa.46:10-11 I make known the end from the beginning, ... I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please. 11 ... What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do.**

This includes both blessing and calamity.

**1 Sam.2:6-7 The LORD brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up. 7 The LORD sends poverty and wealth; he humbles and he exalts.**

**Job 2:10 Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?"**

**Lam.3:38 Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both calamities and good things come?**

**Isa.45:7 I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things.**

**Amos 3:6 When disaster comes to a city, has not the LORD caused it?**

**Ecc.7:14 When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider: God has made the one as well as the other.**

You will never be able to appreciate the providence of God until you understand that God controls all things. Sometimes people do not like living with the paradox of free will and the sovereignty of God, and so they water down one side or the other. Some people want to water down free will, and say there is no free will – we are essentially robots.

The other side wants to water down the sovereignty of God and say that God doesn't really control everything. People like that will read Romans 8:28, where God promises to work all things together for good for those who are called, and they say, "That does not really mean that God controls everything. It just means God allows people to exercise their free will, and then He comes along behind them and makes the best of what they have done." So evil people do evil things outside of the control of God, and then God comes along afterward and kind of patches things up.

That is not what the Bible says. You cannot have God be sovereign over everything except human decision-making. So much of what happens is determined by human decision-making, that if God is in control of everything but that, He is not really in control at all. If He is not in charge of what people end up deciding to do, what good are His promises to protect me or care for me or guide me? Besides, the Bible is very explicit and clear about God's control over the outcome of human decision-making.

**Pr.21:1 The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases.**

**Pr.16:1 To man belong the plans of the heart, but from the LORD comes the reply of the tongue.**

**Pr.16:9 In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps.**

**Pr.20:24 A man's steps are directed by the LORD. How then can anyone understand his own way?**

God is in control of whether you have favor or disfavor in someone else's eyes – so He is in control even of people's affections. Acts four is talking about the people who murdered the Son of God on a cross.

**Acts 4:28 They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.**

People are free to decide however they please. They are not coerced against their will to think or decide anything. And yet, when they do what they want to do it ends up being exactly what God determined beforehand should happen. Do not conclude from this that God is in any sense the author of evil. He is not the author of evil directly or indirectly. (James 1:11-13) When there is an evil action, the evil part of it comes from human beings, and all of the good in that same event comes from God. God only does good. In speaking of the horrible sins of Joseph's brothers Joseph said...

**Gen.50:20 You intended evil against me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.**

## **Purpose**

Pay careful attention to that word "intended." The reason the word "providence" was chosen to describe this doctrine is because the Latin roots of the word have to do with intention and purpose. God controls all things – but that, by itself, is not the doctrine of Providence. Providence is much more than that. In His providence God not only controls all things, but He has intention behind all things.

Probably the most basic characteristic of a rational being is that a rational beings act with reference to an end, or purpose. Everything a rational being decides to do has some purpose. And God is a

rational being. So if God has a purpose in mind for everything that He does, and He controls all things that ever happen, that means He has a purpose in mind for every single event that ever happens. Everything God does He does intentionally. He does it on purpose, in order to accomplish some end. So it is not enough to just believe that God controls everything.

God not only controls everything, but is causing everything that happens to happen for the purpose of accomplishing some goal. And God does not have any small goals – all His purposes are eternal purposes. He is not shortsighted about anything. I do not know how that lands on you when you hear it, but what it should do is fill up every single thing that happens in your life with eternal significance. The doctrine of the providence of God should pump your life full of eternity. Nothing is unimportant, because the doctrine of providence connects everything to God eternal purposes.

W.B. Pope: “Providence is the most comprehensive term in the language of theology. It is the background of all the several departments of religious truth, a background mysterious in its commingled brightness and darkness. It penetrates and fills the whole compass of the relations of man with his Maker. It connects the unseen God with the visible creation, and the visible creation with the work of redemption, and redemption with personal salvation, and personal salvation with the end of all things. It carries our thoughts back to the supreme purpose which was in the beginning with God, and forward to the foreseen end and consummation of all things, while it includes between these the whole infinite variety of the dealings of God with man”<sup>1</sup>

## **Providential Propulsion: “I will send him”**

### **The Sending of Saul**

The reason I took the time for all that is because understanding providence is essential for understanding Old Testament narrative – especially 1 Samuel nine. God is always carrying out His providential work, but there are some times when it is especially important for us to take notice of it. This chapter is one of those times, and we know that because of verse 16.

Let me just refresh your memory as to what is going on. Saul is out looking for his father’s lost donkeys, and is getting nowhere. So finally he decides to give up and just head back home. But the servant has the bright idea to ask Samuel about the donkeys, since he happens to be in the town that they were passing.

Saul has never heard of Samuel, and he does not like the idea anyway because he does not have any money to pay Samuel for his services. But the servant digs down in his pocket and finds some silver, and talks Saul into going. So they start heading toward town, and they run into some girls on their way to draw water. It makes me chuckle every time I listen to this chapter on my Bible on CD. They ask these girls one simple question and the girls volunteer a whole lot of information.

**<sup>11</sup> ... they asked them, "Is the seer here?"**

And the answer these girls give goes all the way down to verse 14. It was a yes or no question, and the girls tell them the answer to that, and where he is, and why he is there, and what he is doing, and how to find him, and the people will not eat until he comes to bless the sacrifice, and then the people will eat, and so they should really go right now and hurry, and maybe they will catch him. Every time I listen to that I think, “It is probably a good thing that they did not bump into some guys walking out of the city. Their answer to the question “Is the seer here?” would have been, “yeah” and that would have been the end of it. But the girls tell them not only where Saul is, but they explain that they need to hurry.

So after this whole description of seemingly random events that brings Saul to Samuel, we find out in verses 15 and 16 that God wants us to think of those events in terms of His providence.

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<sup>1</sup> W. B. Pope, *Compendium of Christian Theology*, I, 456

**<sup>15</sup> Now the day before Saul came, the LORD had revealed this to Samuel: <sup>16</sup> "About this time tomorrow I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin. Anoint him leader over my people Israel**

God said, "On a certain day at a certain time of day I will send this man to you." How does God send a man like Saul to a meeting like this and make sure he is not early or late? Did He do it with a voice from heaven: "Saul, go to Zuph and be sure to arrive at 11:00 on Thursday"? No. He just let some natural process happen that resulted in the donkeys getting out. And the donkeys, using their own free donkey will, chose to wander wherever they pleased. And Saul's dad, using his own free will, picked Saul and that servant to go chase them. And Saul, using his own substandard donkey wrangling skills, ended up near Zuph, a place that was nowhere near the donkeys, but where Samuel happened to be. And the girls decided to go get water just because they needed water, because their families had been drinking the amounts they felt like drinking. And they happened to be informed, friendly, talkative girls who tell them to hurry. And the servant happened to know about Samuel, and happened to have a piece of silver on him. You have a whole lot of people and even animals just wandering around doing whatever they want to do – that is how God sends a guy like Saul to Zuph. He did not say, "He will come" He said, "I will send him."

That is how God sends you where you need to be. He does it by just letting everybody run around doing whatever they choose to do. He does it by letting fences break down because of some rotting wood that rotted because of normal, natural processes, or some careless family member forgetting to shut the gate. God will let your transmission go out, or see to it that you run out of milk, or that you need to stop at the bank, or whatever it takes to get you in just the right place at just the right time.

## **More amazing than miracles**

I have said many times, I am more amazed and astonished by providence than I am by miracles. Because miracles I can understand. It is easy to understand the concept of a big God wanting to get something done, so He just reaches down, interrupts the normal flow of things, and does it directly. That is pretty much the same way we get things done, except on a smaller scale. That I can understand.

But what boggles my mind is providence. How does God just let a wooden fence rot at its natural rate, and let donkeys do whatever they want, and let Saul's dad respond however he pleases, and let Saul go wherever he thinks the donkeys might be, and let the servant put whatever he wants into his pocket before he leaves, and let the girls get water whenever they need water, and still see to it that Saul ends up in exactly the right place at the right time? I cannot even begin to think about how God does that. Miracles are kind of like an act of a human being, except expanded out to a size that would require more power than human beings have. But nothing we do is like providence. There is no human analogy. I never understand why some Christians seem to be more impressed with miracles than with providence. If I pray and ask God to let me arrive at a meeting on time even though I left the house late, if He just miraculously picks me up and transports me through the air like Philip, that miracle would be impressive. But what is far more impressive to me is if He does it by means of providence. If He sees to it that all the lights are green and I cross the tracks just before the train comes and I find a parking spot right in front. Because for God to use providence to make sure a stoplight is green at a certain moment, He has to have that in mind all the way back however many years prior when the cycle on that light was first set. And the same goes for all the other lights. Plus, He has to make sure those lights will be the right signal at the right time for each of the millions of people who will ever come to that intersection over the years. And beyond that, God has to do that by just letting some traffic engineer determine whatever he thought would be the best cycle. And that engineer's decision will be shaped by thousands of factors going all the way back to when he was born. The same goes for the train. For me to beat the train God has to have had been at work a long time ago whenever the schedules were being set for the departure of that train, which was determined by people with free will who were deciding based on whatever they thought best.

If you went into a really messy preschool at the end of the day and picked up everything and put it exactly where you wanted it, that might be somewhat impressive if it is a lot of stuff. But how much

more impressive if you just let 50 preschoolers do whatever they pleased, and then at the end of the day, without you intervening in anyway, saw to it that each item ended up exactly where you planned for it to end up – that would really be amazing. But what if instead of 50 preschoolers it is the tens of billions of human beings who have lived on this planet since creation?

What an amazing thing God's providence is! When you start to think of all the variables involved – your parents make one decision a little differently, that results in you being born a year earlier than you were born, and you would have had all different friends in school, met all different people - and all those people's lives would have been different. I forget my sunglasses and have to run back in the house to get them, and I am a couple minutes later getting to the store. So now a different person makes a green light because I am not where I would have been in traffic, and that person arrives somewhere at a different moment and bumps into a different person and ends up having a different conversation, and the chain of differences goes on forever – just from me forgetting my sunglasses one time. And that is multiplied times all the human beings in the world, and that astronomical number is multiplied by the number of decisions all those people make – not to mention the decisions of all the animals that effect circumstances and the events of nature. The sun happens to flare, and that along with several other events creates a weather pattern, which, just because of the laws of physics happens to join up with another weather pattern, and the result is two inches of snow instead of a dusting, and as a result of that one of your loved ones slides off the road and is killed. Or maybe slides off the road and is unhurt, saving her life from the head on collision she would have had a moment later if she had not slid off the road. To orchestrate all that in order to bring about one certain outcome in the end would be a feat beyond comprehension. But to be able to orchestrate all that, to bring about billions and billions of outcomes – every outcome there is - to be in line with His plan is a work of wisdom and power so far beyond the ability of words to describe that it breaks out of the very capacities of human imagination.

What an amazing thing it is to be the child of a God who can do that, as easily as you can think a thought! And who is only good; A God who has promised all of His fullness to you, and who controls absolutely everything; everything! Even decisions donkeys make; The decisions your dog makes; The decisions your boss makes, your children make, you make; The things that happen to your piece of junk washing machine; The bizarre inexplicable processes within Windows Vista – *everything!* Who could have imagined that this assignment from Saul's father – “Go find the donkeys” or the girls, “Go get some water” was a sending by God on a mission of national and global and universal and cosmic significance?

## **Loud and quiet providence**

Compared to miracles, providence seems dull and unimpressive at first glance. And beyond that, among God's providential acts, some of those seem more like acts of God than others. When big, life-shaking events happen it is not uncommon to hear someone say, “God is *really* doing something.” If a ministry is struggling financially and an unexpected anonymous gift for a million dollars comes in, it is immediately assumed that God is getting ready to do some great work. In times of huge, massive trials as well as times of wonderful, grand blessings our eyes tend to open up wide to see what God is doing.

But just as it is wrong to assume that God is more at work in miracles than in providence, it is equally wrong to assume that God's providence is more at work in big, unusual events than in common, ordinary events. God's providential work in getting Joseph into Pharaoh's court was through big, unusual events. It is not every day you get sold into slavery by your brothers or falsely accused and thrown into prison as an innocent man in a foreign country. But the providential work of God to “send” Saul to Samuel, was through events that were as small and ordinary as they come – a farm chore. What is more common and ordinary than looking for something that is lost? But God was no less at work in Saul's circumstances than in Joseph's. God's quiet providence is no less powerful or important than His loud providence. The builder who halts other activities in order to let the cement of the foundation dry accomplishes just as much toward the final goal as the one who is loudly cutting boards and hammering nails. William Blaikie “We cannot but see how silently, secretly, often slowly, yet surely, He accomplishes His purposes. There are certain rivers in nature that flow so gently, that when looking at

the water only, the eye of the spectator is unable to discern any movement at all. Often the ways of God resemble such rivers. Looking at what is going on in common life, it is so ordinary, so absolutely quiet, that you can see no trace whatever of any Divine plan. Things seem left to themselves, and God appears to have no connection with them. And yet, all the while, the most insignificant of them is contributing towards the accomplishment of the mighty plans of God. By means of ten thousand times ten thousand agents, conscious and unconscious, things are moving on toward the grand consummation.”<sup>2</sup> Things are never “left to themselves.” So learn to enjoy both His loud and His quiet providence. God is just as much at work in your daily chores and minor “mishaps” as He is in big, life changing moves or job changes.

## Learn to Love Providence (Enjoy the benefits)

The main goal of the sermon this morning is to urge you to develop a pattern of noticing and enjoying God’s providence. Let me just suggest five benefits to doing that (I am sure there are many more, but this will get your thinking started).

### 1. 24/7 access to fellowship with God

First, taking notice of and enjoying God’s providence will give you constant, 24/7 access to fellowship with God. God’s providence is constant. Sometimes people read the Bible and see statements about “God did this” and “God did that” And they assume that it must be referring to extraordinary, supernatural means - a voice from heaven or a pillar of fire. And people like that tend to think God is not at work in their lives because they do not see a lot of miracles and they do not hear voices from heaven. And so they wonder “Why was God so active in Bible times and so inactive now?”

So it is a precious, wonderful thing when the Bible writers every once in a while show us that, when they say that God did something it is usually by means of normal, mundane, ordinary circumstances. And that is just as much God’s work as when He does miracles. It sounds like it might be supernatural because the narrator lets us know what God’s purposes were. But if you had been there and seen it for yourself, it would have seemed like normal, natural circumstances.

One of the greatest examples of that is the book of Esther. There is not a single reference to God in that whole book. That is not an accident. The writer of Esther did not get to the end and say, “Oh! I forgot to mention God!” God is the main character in the book. But instead of pointing to God’s actions the writer points to God’s purposes. Esther becomes queen with no mention of God’s involvement, but then come these wonderful words:

**“And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?” (4:14).**

“Esther, you have been placed in this position at this time for a purpose.” But for whose purpose? Certainly not the king’s. It was God’s purpose. The writer of Esther masterfully demonstrates the marvelous work of God without ever explicitly mentioning God in order to teach us how to think about providence when looking at it from the earthly perspective without the benefit of a biblical narrator.

Once you understand that God’s providence is ongoing 24/7, think of the implications for fellowship with Him. You have fellowship with God when you consciously experience and enjoy the expression of one of His attributes. There are some kinds of fellowship with God that are not available all the time (for example the kind we are enjoying right now – when God is present in a special way when all the saints are gathered together). You cannot experience God’s beauty in a spectacular sunset or God’s deliverance from a certain calamity any moment you want to. But God’s providential work is going on all around you at every moment. And so just imagine the fellowship and communion we could have with God if we could learn to enjoy the experience of being in the middle of the unfolding of His perfect plan. There would never be a time when you could not have joy!

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<sup>2</sup> W. G. Blaikie, An Exposition of 1 Samuel, 37.

## 2) Fills every part of life with meaning (Watch the movie)

Secondly, being aware of and enjoying God's providence will fill up your life with meaning. It is kind of comical, if you think about it, how interested we are in movies. There are times when everyone in the theater is on the edge of their seat watching someone walk down a hallway or dial a phone. The reason we are so interested in the details of a movie is because in a movie we know that each thing they show has some relevance to the story. If the camera zooms in on someone's eyes as he glances at the clock, then we know there is some significance to that. And when we cannot see how something is relevant it makes us even more interested, because we know it must be relevant, and that eventually we will see how.

But if you understand the doctrine of the providence of God you know that everything, down to the smallest movement of a single molecule, has a grand, eternal purpose. For some of them He has revealed what the purpose is. For others we have to do the same thing we do when we watch a movie – realize there is a purpose for it that will eventually be revealed. When you see heavy traffic, or crowds of people scurrying around like ants on an anthill, people going every which way, thousands of things happening all at once, sit back and marvel over the fact that all of it is being carefully orchestrated by a perfect, infinitely good being who loves you, and is doing every one of those actions for a grand purpose, fitting it all together to accomplish His exact intention, which will result in the greatest possible glory for His name, which will give us the greatest possible enjoyment of Him. And then just rejoice and enjoy being the child of such a God! It is better than just watching a movie, because you're in this movie!

What a blessed thing it is to belong to a God who works all things together for good for us! A God who arranges high-level meetings by the wanderings of some wayward donkeys; Who saves a nation by means of the sins of some jealous brothers, the movements of a caravan, the outcome of a slave auction, the lust of an adulteress, and the dreams of some prisoners - A God who brings about the prophesied details of the birth of the Savior of the world through the decision of some pagan official regarding the administrative, political details of a census. How utterly impossible it would have been for that guy in Jerusalem to know, when he purchased a donkey, that he was a tool in the hand of God to provide the mount for the Triumphal Entry of the Savior of the world! How oblivious was Naomi, when she said, "Call me 'bitter' because I went away full and came back empty" to the fact that standing next to her was the great grandmother of king David, and that she would be in the messianic line! What a small, irrelevant, mundane action it must have seemed like when a Jewish mother packed a little lunch with some loaves and fishes for her child that day, or when a Samaritan woman decided to head out to the well outside Sychar to draw water. Who could have guessed that when Lamech met some woman through some chance encounter that they would end up married and would give birth to a little guy who would grow up to be the only remaining godly man in the world, and who would build an ark that would save humanity from total annihilation?

## 3) Painful providence gives meaning to suffering

Some acts of God's providence are incredibly painful. And you might think at first – "That thing that happened was so horrible, I do not want to think about it as coming from God." How are we to think about God's acts of providence that bring harm and pain? God's providential work does bring harm to some people, but *never* to believers.

### **Ps.121:7 The LORD will keep you from all harm**

God promises *total* safety and protection for the believer. And yet it doesn't seem like we enjoy total protection. Horrible, dreadful, evil things happen to us. We suffer hardship, sickness, trials, sorrow, and even death. In fact, Scripture promises we will suffer those things and reminds us not to be surprised when they come as though something strange were happening (1 Pe.4:12). So how can



Scripture promise suffering and also promise total protection from harm? Obviously, God's idea of harm does not match our idea of harm. Nowhere is this more obvious than in Luke 21:16-18. Jesus said:

**You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death... <sup>18</sup> But not a hair of your head will perish.**

We will suffer loss, persecution and death; but never actual harm – even to a single hair on our head. The benefit that God works through our suffering in this life so outweighs the suffering that it is not even worth comparing them.

Just as an infant feels that the discomfort of a diaper change or going down for a nap is an intolerable evil and cannot imagine how it could be anything but harm, the loving mother knows that in the long run those things are for the best and will make the child happier.

**Psalm 4:8 I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.**

The reason he could lie down and sleep in such peace is because he knew that no matter what happened – even if some illness came upon him in the night, or an enemy put a spear through him – no matter what, he would suffer no real harm. People in the world may suffer meaningless, useless pain; but that never happens to a Christian. And that is because of the purpose behind God's providence. When people in the world suffer, it is just meaningless. But we can be assured that all of our pain is utterly necessary and brings about only our good. We never suffer anything that is not worth the benefit that is being wrought.

#### **4) Defeats sin**

So learning to be aware of and to enjoy the providence of God enables you to have 24/7 access to fellowship with God, it will fill up your life with meaning, and it will carry you through suffering. Fourth, think of how many different sins would be conquered in your life. What do you think would happen to your sinful anger, for example? When your kids or husband or wife or boss or co-worker does something that normally makes you mad; if you happen to be looking at things from the perspective of the human side only (like an atheist), it is going to make you mad. But if at that moment you happen to be enjoying the experience of being right in the middle of God's perfect plan, and you are enjoying watching the providential unfolding of all God's purposes, so that whatever your boss or kids or husband does, instead of focusing mainly on their sinful role, you are focused on God's wonderful, eternal, perfect purposes, you are going to have a lot more joy than anger.

Knowing there is a good enough purpose kills the anger. If someone or some thing delays you for five minutes for no good purpose, that makes you mad. But if you are delayed five minutes in order to save the lives of 100 people, it would not bother you a bit. If you had to pick something up off the floor for no good reason, you might get mad at whoever left it there. But if you could bring an end to the slave trade world wide just by picking up someone else's mess off the floor, you would be thrilled to do it. If we could somehow have our eyes opened to the doctrine of providence and learn to enjoy the experience of it every day, sinful anger would be out the window.

So would worry. If you see God controlling everything, and you know that He only does good things, what is there to worry about? Complaining would be out of the picture; anxiety would drop out of your life, cowardice would be a thing of the past, pride would be deflated. (It is hard to get too puffed up about something Someone else is doing). On the other hand, how much would it crank up the volume of your thanksgiving? Think of what it would do for your joy and peace? Imagine the impact on your generosity. How much would your love for God increase each day as you watched Him at work?

#### **5) The river of providence: certainty of progress**

One more – enjoying the providence of God will increase your hope and joy in the final redemption of all creation. The more aware you are of God's providence the more you will think about God's purposes behind all that He does, and the more you will appreciate the certainty on the ultimate, final purpose of all things. I love the analogy of thinking of God's providential work as being like a river. The other day I was out walking and praying and it just hit me that the seconds ticking off my watch – the passing of time, is carrying me along toward God's final purposes and the consummation of all things with unstoppable force. God's work rushes ahead like a mighty river, and I can no more hold back the flow of time than I could stand before the Zambezi river and put out my hand and stop the billions of tons of current. I would just be swept along without the slightest disruption if its flow. And it just hit me that I was at that moment – and every moment, being swept along by the river of divine providence. I am in the river, and so I am absolutely, positively not going anywhere except where that river is going. And that river is flowing toward the wonderful, marvelous, magnificent, glorious consummation of all things. It is flowing toward the purpose God had in mind when He did every single thing He has ever done since the creation. And whether I resist the current or submit to it, either way I am swept along at the same speed. The final climax of God's plan is as certain as anything could be, and it is getting closer with each second that ticks off the clock, whether I am awake or asleep.

What an amazing thing to be able to look around and see all the events going on around me, and realize: *that is the current*. I am being swept along – carried by a force billions of times greater than I. A force controlled by a person; Controlled by - my Father who loves me; - my God, who does only good; - my Savior who redeems what was ruined and hopeless; - my Creator who made me on purpose for a reason; - my King who reigns over all.

**Benediction: Heb 12:28-29 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, 29 for our "God is a consuming fire."**

# Devotionals:

## Providence

### 1 Samuel 9 Day 1

**1 Samuel 9:16 About this time tomorrow I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin. Anoint him leader over my people Israel**

God said He would “send” Saul to Samuel at a certain time on a certain day, and He did exactly that. But the way God sent Him was by means of the most mundane circumstances. He did not appear to Saul in a vision like He did when He sent Peter to Cornelius. He just let some donkeys escape from the farm. That was followed by a whole lot of natural, normal, mundane circumstances – the donkeys wandering wherever they pleased, Kish sending Saul and that particular servant to find them, Saul making decisions about where to look based on his best judgments, some girls going out to get water simply because they needed some water, etc. Who could have imagined that this assignment from Saul’s father – “Go find the donkeys,” or the girls, “Go get some water” was a sending by God on a mission of national and global significance? How marvelous and amazing is God’s providential work! How all the agents involved could have just acted according to their free will and still have the exact outcome that God had planned is more amazing and more difficult for the human mind to fathom and more astonishing and required more power than for God to have simply done a miracle and transported Saul to Samuel supernaturally.

The word “providence does not appear in the Bible, and yet it is a major theme. In fact, one entire book is dedicated to showcasing it (Esther).<sup>3</sup> The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia defines providence as “that preservation care and government which God exercises over all things that He has created in order they may accomplish the ends for which they were created.” It is God accomplishing all His purposes by means of all that takes place in the creation. God controls absolutely everything, and uses all of it to bring about His perfect plan.

*I praise You, dear Father in heaven, for Your power and wisdom in How You bring about every detail of Your perfect plan through providence. When I begin to think of all the variables involved – each decision a person makes has millions of ramifications. If I forget my sunglasses as I am leaving for the store and have to run back in the house to get them, I am a couple minutes later getting to the store. That results in a different person making a green light because I’m not where I would have been in traffic, a different person getting the parking space I would have had, a person being one place closer in line and a later person being one*

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<sup>3</sup> God is never mentioned in the entire book of Esther. That is not an accident. The whole book is about God’s marvelous rescue of His people. It is the book from which we get those wonderful words: “And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?” (4:14). The writer masterfully demonstrates the marvelous work of God without ever explicitly mentioning God in order to teach us how to think about providence when looking at it from the earthly perspective.

*place further back, and the list goes on forever. And that is multiplied times all the human beings in the world, and that astronomical number is multiplied by the number of decisions all those people make – not to mention the decisions of all the animals that effect circumstances. To orchestrate all that in order to bring about one certain outcome in the end would be a feat beyond comprehension. But to be able to orchestrate all that to bring about billions and billions of outcomes – every outcome there is to be in line with Your plan is a work of wisdom and power so far beyond the ability of words to describe that breaks out of the very capacities of human imagination.*

*Teach me to love Your providential hand, dear God. Open my eyes to see it. When my transmission goes out, let me see that as an official, divine commission sending me on a royal mission to the repair shop. When the phone rings or someone stops by remind me that they have been sent by You to me for a grand and glorious purpose. I don't know if my role is like Saul's or Samuel's or the girls' or the donkeys' but I know I am part of Your marvelous providential work. Teach my heart to perceive that and to enjoy being used as a tool in Your hand. Teach me to enjoy the unfolding of Your perfect plan right before my eyes – a million times better than any movie. Teach me to watch the drama of Your work with greater interest than I watch an entertaining movie. Teach me to enjoy the feeling of being swept along by the blessed current of Your river of providence every moment of every day.*

*And when the characters in Your great Play do things that create an inconvenience or some pain for me, help me not to focus on them, but on the great Playwright who had a marvelous reason for putting that into the script.*

**Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy:** Providence

**Promise to trust:** He will carry out His perfect plan

**What will result if I experience this attribute today:** Safety and protection, Peace and calmness, Confidence, courage, Hope

# Providence

## 1 Samuel 9-10 Day 2

**Psalm 135:6** The LORD does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths

**Dan.4:35** He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?"

**Eph.1:11** we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will,

**Isaiah 46:10-11** <sup>10</sup> I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please. <sup>11</sup> ... What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do.

**1 Samuel 2:6-7** <sup>6</sup> "The LORD brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up. <sup>7</sup> The LORD sends poverty and wealth; he humbles and he exalts.

**Job 2:10** Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?"

**Lamentations 3:38** Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both calamities and good things come?

**Isaiah 45:7** I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things.

**Amos 3:6** When disaster comes to a city, has not the LORD caused it?

**Ecclesiastes 7:14** When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider: God has made the one as well as the other.

God's providence is not merely God allowing people to exercise their free will, and then coming along behind them and making the best of what they have done. It is much greater than that. The roots of the word "providence" have to do with intention and purpose. Perhaps the most basic characteristic of a rational being is that a rational being acts with reference to an end, or purpose. Everything a rational being decides to do has a purpose.

If God, then, has a purpose in mind for everything that He does, and He controls all things that ever happen, then He has a purpose in mind for every single event that ever happens. Everything God does He does on purpose, in order to accomplish some end. And every single thing that ever happens is ultimately done by God.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> It should not be concluded from this that God is in any sense the author of evil. He is not the author of evil directly or indirectly. Every event that happens, including the most wicked sins, are a mixture of both good and evil. All of the evil in an event is supplied not by God, but by

“Providence is the most comprehensive term in the language of theology. It is the background of all the several departments of religious truth, a background mysterious in its commingled brightness and darkness. It penetrates and fills the whole compass of the relations of man with his Maker. It connects the unseen God with the visible creation, and the visible creation with the work of redemption, and redemption with personal salvation, and personal salvation with the end of all things. It carries our thoughts back to the supreme purpose which was in the beginning with God, and forward to the foreseen end and consummation of all things, while it includes between these the whole infinite variety of the dealings of God with man” (W. B. Pope, *Compendium of Christian Theology*, I, 456).

Why do we tend to be more interested in a movie than in watching the most magnificent drama of all – the unfolding of God’s perfect plan through His providential work all around us? Perhaps it is partly because in a movie we can see the relevance of each thing that happens. And when we can’t, we assume it will become evident before the end of the movie. But in real life, the great majority of things that happen seem to have no purpose.

Scripture is clear, however, that every one of them, down to the smallest movement of a single molecule, has a grand, eternal purpose. So the more we learn from Scripture about the meaning of categories of things (suffering, pleasantness, ministry, failure, etc.) we can enjoy watching the drama of God’s great plan unfolding. And even those things for which we do not know the purpose, we can do exactly what we do when watching a movie – assume there is a purpose for it.

*Teach me, dear God, to enjoy Your providential work. Teach me to be thrilled every day to not only see it but to be part of it! As I see crowds of people scurrying around like ants on an anthill, cars driving every which way, etc., let that cause me to marvel when I realize all of it is being carefully orchestrated by You and is all fitting together to accomplish Your exact intention. Teach me to rejoice to be the child of such a God!*

*Oh, what a blessed thing it is to be the child of a God who works all things together for good for the called. A God who arranges high-level meeting by the wanderings of some wayward donkeys. Who saves a nation by means of the sins of some jealous brothers, the movements of a caravan, the outcome of a slave auction, the lust of an adulteress, and the dreams of some prisoners; a God who brings about the prophesied details of the birth of the Savior of the world through the decision of some pagan official regarding the details of a census. How utterly impossible it would have been for the person in Jerusalem to know, when he purchased a donkey, that he was a tool in the hand of God to provide the mount for the Triumphal Entry! How oblivious was Naomi, when she said, “Call me ‘bitter’ because I went away full and came back empty” to the fact that standing next to her was the great grandmother of king David, and that she would be in the messianic line! How impossible it would have been to predict that when a man and a woman gave birth to a daughter and, in the same town a woman began bleeding, that 12 years later the two would come together in an encounter with the Son of God in which He would teach a grand lesson about the urgency and tenderness in the way God loves an outcast like a father loves his dying adolescent daughter. What a small, irrelevant, mundane action it must have seemed like when a Jewish mother packed a little lunch with some loaves and fishes for her child that day, or when a Samaritan woman decided to head out to the well outside Sychar to draw water, or when a poor woman dropped a penny into the treasury. Open my eyes, dear Lord, to what an amazing thing it is to be the child of such a God!*

*Help me to realize today, dear God, that there are no small things. If everything is being worked together for Your great plan, everything is important. In a trip to some important place it would be silly to say that taking the big onramp onto a huge, 10 lane interstate is a big thing, but pulling out of my driveway is a small thing. Even though one may be more difficult and more dramatic and more exciting,*

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fallen creatures. And all of the good in that some event comes from God. God does only good. (Gn.50:20 you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good)

*and the other may be simple and common and mundane, both are equally necessary for the process of arriving at the destination. Let me not despise any part of Your providential work.*

*If my eyes were opened to this truth about You, how it would change my outlook! How it would eliminate sinful anger, worry, complaining, and anxiety. How it would increase the intensity and genuineness of my thanksgiving. How would cause my love for You to increase every single day as I watched You at work. Teach me to enjoy Your providential work, dear God.*

**Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy:** Providence

**Promise to trust:** He will carry out His perfect plan

**What will result if I experience this attribute today:** Safety and protection, Peace and calmness, Confidence, courage, Hope

# Providence

## 1 Samuel 9-10 Day 3

**1 Samuel 9:16 About this time tomorrow I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin. Anoint him leader over my people Israel**

**1 Samuel 9:3-4 Now the donkeys belonging to Saul's father Kish were lost, and Kish said to his son Saul, "Take one of the servants with you and go and look for the donkeys." <sup>4</sup> So he passed through the hill country of Ephraim and through the area around Shalisha, but they did not find them. They went on into the district of Shaalim, but the donkeys were not there. Then he passed through the territory of Benjamin, but they did not find them.**

Compared to miracles, providence seems dull and unimpressive at first glance. In yesterday's devotional we saw that providence is, if anything, more impressive – but at first glance it does *seem* less impressive. And beyond that, among God's providential acts, some of those seem more like acts of God than others. When big, life-shaking events happen it is not uncommon to hear someone say, "God is doing something." If a ministry is struggling financially and an unexpected anonymous gift for a million dollars comes in, it is immediately assumed that God is getting ready to do some great work. In times of huge, massive trials as well as times of wonderful, grand blessings our eyes open wide to see what God is doing.

But just as it is wrong to assume that God is more at work in miracles than in providence, it is equally wrong to assume that God is more at work in big, unusual events than in common, ordinary events. God's providential work in getting Joseph into Pharaoh's court was through big, unusual events. It is not every day you get sold into slavery by your brothers or falsely accused and thrown into prison as an innocent man in a foreign country. But the providential work of God to "send" Saul to Samuel, was through events that were as small and ordinary as they come – a farm chore. What is more common and ordinary than looking for something that is lost? But God was no less at work in Saul's circumstances than in Joseph's.

William Blaikie "We cannot but see how silently, secretly, often slowly, yet surely, He accomplishes His purposes. There are certain rivers in nature that flow so gently, that when looking at the water only, the eye of the spectator is unable to discern any movement at all. Often the ways of God resemble such rivers. Looking at what is going on in common life, it is so ordinary, so absolutely quiet, that you can see no trace whatever of any Divine plan. Things seem left to themselves, and God appears to have no connection with them. And yet, all the while, the most insignificant of them is contributing towards the accomplishment of the mighty plans of God. By means of ten thousand times ten thousand agents, conscious and unconscious, things are moving on toward the grand consummation."<sup>5</sup>

God's quiet providence is no less powerful or important than His loud providence. Halting other activities in order to let the cement of the foundation dry accomplishes just as much toward the final goal as loudly cutting boards and hammering nails.

*Dear Father in heaven, teach me to enjoy both Your loud and Your quiet providence. You are just as much at work in my daily chores and minor "mishaps" as You are in big, life changing moves or job changes. Increase my faith, dear God, and expand my capacity for conscious awareness of Your work more moments of the day than I currently think about it.*

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<sup>5</sup> W. G. Blaikie, An Exposition of 1 Samuel, 37.



*I love the analogy of a river to describe Your providential work. As I watch the seconds tick off my watch I'm reminded of how utterly impossible it is for me to hold back the flow of time. Your work rushes on like a mighty river, and I can no more hold it back than I could stand before the Zambezi and put out my hand and stop the river. I would just be swept along without the slightest disruption if its flow.*

*Dear God, I'm starting to learn to love the feeling of being swept along by the river of Your providence. I don't have to jump in, I don't have to run along; I can resist it or submit to it, but either way I'm swept along at the same speed, and I am absolutely not going anywhere but where this river is going. The final consummation of all things that You have in mind is as certain as anything could be, and I will be swept by the current of providence toward that consummation – getting closer with each second that ticks off the clock, whether I'm awake or asleep. I love the feeling, dear Lord, of being swept along by Your river of grace. As I look around and see all the events going on around me, that's the current. I'm being swept along – carried by a force billions of times greater than I. A force controlled by a person; my Father who loves me; my God, who does only good; my Savior who redeems what was ruined and hopeless; my King who reigns over all.*

*And dear Father, even when there are places in this massive river that are slow, and the current imperceptible, the power of the unseen current is still millions of times greater than anything I could even begin to stand against or resist. Exactly the same volume of water flows through the calm spots as through the rapids. Teach me to treasure Your quiet providence. Teach me to love all Your sendings that happen just by me looking unsuccessfully for something that's lost or carrying out a common daily chore.*

**Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy:** Providence

**Promise to trust:** He will carry out His perfect plan

**What will result if I experience this attribute today:** Safety and protection, Peace and calmness, Confidence, courage, Hope

# Providence

## 1 Samuel 9-10 Day 4

**Psalm 119:90 Your faithfulness is for all generations; You established the earth, and it stands firm. <sup>91</sup> They stand today in accordance with Your judgments, for all things are Your servants.**

The whole order of nature depends completely on the commandment and decree of God. Both matter and the laws of physics exist and continue on through the power of God's Word. The reason we observe constancy and reliability in the creation is due only to the faithfulness of God. The forces of nature, the laws of motion and thermodynamics, instinct in animals, gravity, electromagnetism, atomic energy, quantum physics – all of them function reliably and consistently because of God's command.

They, along with everything else, are God's servants. Particles of dust, snowflakes, fuel pumps, computers, cancer cells, chocolate cake, supernovas, peanuts, each one of the hairs on your head – all things are God's servants. They are slaves that stand in His presence ready to do His bidding every moment of every day, and none of them ever do anything but what God commands.<sup>6</sup>

*Dear Father in heaven,*

*As I am swept along in this great river of Your providence, I am surrounded and engulfed by Your servants. The very water that makes up this river is comprised only of faithful servants that always do Your bidding. This chair I am sitting in is doing exactly what You are commanding it to do and nothing else, as is the air going into my lungs and the light in my eyes. I am enveloped by Your servants.*

*Why would I ever fear Your servants, who never disobey You? What is there for me to fret or complain about? And what folly it is, dear Lord, when I begin to think that my wellbeing is more dependent upon Your servants than upon You! What can they do unless You command it?*

“Say not, my soul, “From whence can God relieve my care?”  
Remember that Omnipotence has servants everywhere.”<sup>7</sup>

*Teach me to delight, dear God, in Your ubiquitous servants.*

**Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy:** Providence

**Promise to trust:** He will carry out His perfect plan

**What will result if I experience this attribute today:** Safety and protection, Peace and calmness, Confidence, courage, Hope

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<sup>6</sup> Human beings and fallen angels are unique in our ability to disobey God. But even then, still the ultimate purpose of God prevails over the disobedient will of the creature.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Lynch, cited in Treasury of David, v.3, 323.

# Providence

## 1 Samuel 9-10 Day 5

**Psalm 121:6-7 the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night. <sup>7</sup> The LORD will keep you from all harm**

**Psalm 4:8 I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.**

Scripture frequently promises *total* safety and protection for the believer. And yet it doesn't seem like we enjoy total protection. We suffer hardship, sickness, trials, sorrow, and even death. In fact, Scripture promises we will suffer those things and reminds us not to be surprised when they come as though something strange were happening (1 Pe.4:12). So how can Scripture promise suffering and also promise total protection from harm?

Clearly, God's idea of harm does not match our idea of harm. Nowhere is this more obvious than in **Luke 21:16-18 You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. <sup>17</sup> All men will hate you because of me. <sup>18</sup> But not a hair of your head will perish.**

We will suffer the most painful kind of betrayal, loss of family, rejection, and even death. But never actual harm. Not even a single hair on our head will perish.

Just as an infant feels that the discomfort of a diaper change or going down for a nap is an intolerable trial and can't imagine how it could be anything but harm; the loving mother knows that in the long run those things are for the best and will make the child happier. The suffering and sorrow and death in this life are nothing but short-term discomfort for the purpose of long-term benefit and joy.

The reason the psalmist could lie down and sleep in such peace is because he knew that no matter what happened – even if some illness came upon him in the night, or an enemy put a spear through him – no matter what he would suffer no real harm. Fire can't harm gold. It can only improve it. People in the world may suffer meaningless, useless pain; but that never happens to a Christian. We can be assured that all of our pain is utterly necessary and brings about only our good. We never suffer meaningless or unnecessary pain, or anything that is not worth the benefit that is being wrought. That isn't true for the world. They can suffer random pain that brings about no benefit and has no great meaning. They can and do suffer hardship that does do them ultimate harm and no good.

**Psalm 34:19 A righteous man may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all**

*Good morning, dear Lord God,*

*Thank You for the safety I enjoyed last night as I slept. No harm befell me. Powerful demons with malicious, murderous intent would have harmed and destroyed me in a moment had You let up with Your protective hand at any time. The Devil himself seeks to devour me. There are many people who would steal from me, slander me, hurt me, hurt my family, and kill me; but You won't permit it unless it happened in a time and place in which it would do me only great, eternal good. Despite the deadly attacks and volleys of bombs that might have been launched against me last night as I slept, no harm befell me. I suffered no ultimate harm the night before that or the day before that or any time from my conversion until this moment. Thank You, dear God, for Your protective hand! Thank You that 100% of my suffering has meaning.*

*Teach me to fear nothing but sin. Sin is the only thing that can do harm that carries over into the next life. When I choose to rebel against You I forfeit some of the amazing rewards You have promised. Dear God, give me enough faith to see that torture and pain and heartache and sickness and suffering and death are nothing. But sin is disastrous. Loss of my possessions and home and health and loved ones and life are small; disobedience is huge. Teach me to rejoice over the fact that nothing but sin can hurt me; but at the same time make me sober and alert and serious about the fact that the harm I do myself by sin is greater than I'm capable of even imagining. Open my eyes to see things as You see them dear God.*

**Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy:** Providence

**Promise to trust:** He will carry out His perfect plan

**What will result if I experience this attribute today:** Safety and protection, Peace and calmness, Confidence, courage, Hope