

# **Preparing for a Messiah**

*Developing a Deeper Appreciation for God's Sending a Savior*

A Bible Study Workbook by Matthew Allen

## Why This Study?

I love to travel. That's probably a good thing. During my preaching career, I have had the privilege of flying all over the United States. My international excursions have taken me from Alaska to Ukraine and from Canada's Rocky Mountains all the way to Colombia's fertile coffee region high in the Andes. I've always liked being up high, being able to see for miles, and flying gives me the opportunity to do that. I still am amazed in how a five-hour ride in a metal tube moving 500 miles per hour can whisk you off to a different climate, culture, and continent with relative ease.

Have you ever been in a "situation" when you have flown somewhere? I have had a few. In 2001, I left the warm and sunny inclines of the Texas Hill Country on a late March afternoon and flew back to South Dakota, landing in a snowstorm. We were the last plane in before they closed the airport. It was quite a landing ... all you could see was white. A few years later, a Russian pilot in training gave us a suspenseful landing in Kiev. We just about ran out of runway before he got the plane to a complete stop. But my most scary moment onboard happened while flying to Ft. Smith, Arkansas. The landing gear on the small regional jet I was flying on would not open. After several attempts, the pilot had to abandon the landing. There was a beautiful clear sky that day, with an uninterrupted view of the ground. I was sitting in the window seat. As he veered to the south, turning away from his approach, I looked out the window. I can still hear the pilot continuing to try to open the landing gear door, all to no avail. You can imagine where my mind went ... a fiery landing with all sorts of things and people flying through the cabin. As I looked down, I could see familiar things. Buildings, housing additions, and roads. Within 7-8 minutes we were right over where my wife's parents lived. I could see their cars in the driveway. They were all inside, at peace, while unbeknownst to them, I was right over them preparing my mind for a very rough landing on a very small jet. As we continued to drift to the south over the edge of the Ouachita mountains of Arkansas and Oklahoma, the pilot continued to work on getting the landing gear to come down. It seemed like an eternity. Finally, I heard the mechanism engage and the gear move into the proper place. Fifteen minutes later, we were on the ground safely and I was reunited with my wife and children. After what seemed like certain disaster, I was so grateful to God for our being able to land safely so I could be with my family again.

As we study about God's provision for a Savior, I want you to see that the more keenly we feel our need for salvation, the more precious and real our relationship with Jesus will be. It should be our desire to be inside of a dynamic and genuine relationship with God, one where love, appreciation, and thankfulness are in abundance and demonstrated by the way we live our lives. We always need to possess a desperate need for God.

Ephesians 2.1-10 outlines how God saved us by grace through faith *when we were headed for certain disaster*. In 2.11, Paul calls on his readers to *remember*. The wording is in present tense. Remember what? *Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world*, Ephesians 2.12. In the next few verses (2.13-18), Paul's desire is to help his readers to realize, even after salvation, that they should not forget their awful condition and desperate situation before coming to Christ.

Why is this so important? Remembering these things should create a vigorous and lively role in loving Jesus. It has been said that *unless we feel a great need for a Savior, we don't feel that He is a great Savior.*

Matthew Allen

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## Lesson 1

# Introduction and Overview

## Introduction

You are about to embark on a study that will take you through the Old Testament and focus on how God moved through miraculous and providential ways to accomplish His plan with regard to providing a Savior for mankind. God's work and movement to reestablish His relationship with man begins immediately after the incident in the garden. To Satan God declares:

So the Lord God said to the serpent: Because you have done this, you are cursed more than any livestock and more than any wild animal. You will move on your belly and eat dust all the days of your life. I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.

– Genesis 3.14-15

When we examine the last part of the last sentence of Genesis 3.15 we see God looking ahead to the climactic point of His plan of redemption ... the moment on the cross where Jesus would carry out the most critical part of the plan ... that is, serving as the bearer of our sin by being the sacrificial lamb through His death on a cross. Beginning in Genesis 3.16 is the story of how God worked to get us back. The Old Testament imagery of a coming Savior could be likened to the morning sunrise. Beginning with the blackness of darkness that enveloped the world through the sin in the garden, we move from first light toward a glorious and brilliant sunrise pointing to the coming Savior. Throughout the Old Testament we observe deity constantly working to have the plan come to pass. The prophets and inspired writers point out specific references to Christ and His work, although they may did not have a complete understanding of the plan at the time, 1 Peter 1.10-12. Truly these individuals are to be commended for the steadfast commitment to trusting God with regard to unseen things. Having the advantage of hindsight, most likely we do not appreciate their deep abiding trust and *careful investigations*, as we should.

Before we go farther, I believe it is very important we start out with a good understanding of God's providence. Many of the ways He worked to accomplish His plan were behind the scenes, working indirectly through the established laws He ordained in creation. The notion that God walked away after Day 6 of creation and let things to work out by chance is completely false. Instead, the doctrine of providence maintains that God is personally, constantly, and exhaustively pervading, sustaining, and governing every aspect of His creation.<sup>1</sup> In the Bible, when He is not making His presence known by the use of miracles, we observe that He has the power to be personally present and meticulously at work in everything that happens. It was Paul who said that God *works out everything in agreement with the purpose of His will*, Ephesians 1.11.

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<sup>1</sup> Johnson, P. "Providence is Remarkable." See MacArthur, John F., Jr. *John MacArthur Sermon Archive*. Panorama City, CA: Grace to You, 2014.

What is the doctrine of providence and how does it figure into God's preparation for a Savior?

## The Doctrine of Providence

A definition of providence that comes to us from 16<sup>th</sup> century Germany expresses the meaning of this theological term from the Calvinistic perspective:

The Almighty and everywhere present power of God; whereby, as it were by his hand, he upholds and governs heaven, earth, and all creatures; so that herbs and grass, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, meat and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, yea all things come not by chance, but by his fatherly hand.<sup>2</sup>

– Heidelberg Catechism Question 27

While this is a great start to defining providence, the last sentence goes too far in attributing *everything* that happens to the hand of God, which violates passages like Ecclesiastes 9.11: *time and chance happen to all*.

As we think more about defining God's providence, we can assert it is... a continuation of the creation. It encompasses two main categories: God's sovereignty and power over the whole of creation and His care for the details of His creation.<sup>3</sup>

### General Providence

God's *general* providence involves his control of the entire universe.

The Lord has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all.

– Psalm 103.19

God works out everything in agreement with the purpose of His will,

– Ephesians 1.11

God's general providence and control does not negate the free will of moral beings. As we consider God's divine foresight and forethought, as the Creator of the universe, He has created it so that "He has complete control over all, except where He has created free beings (angels and man). Over these His sovereignty is exercised by moral suasion through moral government; there is no other way by which He can control a moral being."<sup>4</sup>

### Specific / Special Providence

This is where God works inside the details of the universe ... moving in history, Acts 2.23, and inside the lives of individuals, especially the elect<sup>5</sup>, Romans 8.28-30; Ephesians 1.1-12.

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<sup>2</sup> Ursinus, Zacharias, and G. W. Williard. *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*. Cincinnati, OH: Elm Street Printing Company, 1888.

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from MacArthur, John, and Richard Mayhue, eds. *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Hailey, Homer. "Providence and the Problem of Evil." *Praise, Prayer and Providence*. Edited by Melvin D. Curry. Florida College Annual Lectures. Temple Terrace, FL: Florida College Bookstore, 1987.

<sup>5</sup> By my usage of the word "elect," here I am not subscribing to the Calvinistic viewpoint regarding "election." God's elect are those who have chosen Him through their own freewill, thus becoming a part of His predetermined plan.

- The physical realm: Job 37.1-13; Psalm 104.14; 135.6; Matthew 5.45
- The animals: Psalm 104.21, 28; Matthew 6.26; 10.29
- The nations: Job 12.23; Psalm 22.28; 66.7; Acts 17.26
- Our birth and life: Psalm 139.16; Galatians 1.15-16
- Our successes and failures: Psalm 75.6-7; Luke 1.52
- Things that appear accidental or by chance or which seem unimportant: Proverbs 16.33; Matthew 10.30
- The protection of His people: Psalm 4.8; 5.12; 63.8; 121.3; Romans 8.28
- The provision for His people: Genesis 22.8, 14; Deuteronomy 8.3; Philippians 4.19
- The answering of prayer: 1 Samuel 1.9-19; 2 Chronicles 33.13; Psalm 65.2; Matthew 7.7; Luke 18.7-8.
- The judgment of the wicked: Psalm 7.12-13; 11.16.

### ***God's Providence as it Relates to Moral Beings***

William N. Clark<sup>6</sup> writes of four truths regarding God's providence:

1. Man, under the natural order, is subject to all-natural laws and consequences, i.e., blessings, accidents, suffering, and death.
2. The natural order is adapted to the moral and spiritual training of free beings, James 1.3-5; 1 Peter 1.5-6.
3. God has the power of guiding free beings from above their freedom without interfering with it; this includes nations and individuals.
4. If He wills, God can directly alter the course of events in answer to human prayer or without it.

### **“Seeing To” or “Providing For”**

In Latin, *providence* comes from the word *provide*, which can be divided in two words. “Pro” means *forward* or *on behalf of*. “Vide” means *to see*. In English, when we speak of providing for someone we mean that we intend *to see on behalf of*. When speaking to someone's need we might say, *I'll see to that*. “Providence” is used in the same way. It means “to supply what is needed; to give sustenance or support.”

In Genesis 22, God instructed Abraham to take his son to Mt. Moriah where he was to be offered up as a sacrifice. When they arrive to the place of sacrifice, Isaac asks, *where is the lamb for the burnt offering?* Abraham replies, *God himself will provide for the burnt offering*, Genesis 22.7-8. In verse 14 Abraham names the place *the Lord will provide*. The Hebrew word for *provide* means “to see.” When God sees it means he will provide. God never simply sees without acting. His *seeing* is always with a view to *doing*. Where He patrols, He controls.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Clark, W. N. *An Outline of Christian Theology*, p. 148-152.

<sup>7</sup> Piper, J. “The Providence of God: Seeing to the Universe.” *Desiring God*, 9/5/1995. Online: Retrieved 11/19/20 from [www.desiringgod.com](http://www.desiringgod.com).

## ***God's Personal Care and Connection with Us***

In Matthew 10, Jesus sends his disciples out to teach and evangelize. It is a sort of practice run for how things will be after the cross and His subsequent resurrection. He tells them in 10.16, *I'm sending you out like sheep among wolves*. He warns of persecution. He says *you will be hated by everyone because of my name*, 10.22. Beginning in 10.26, he begins to urge them that despite all of these horrible things they need not be afraid. God is with them. Notice what He says:

Aren't two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them falls to the ground without your Father's consent. But even the hairs of your head have all been counted. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

– Matthew 10.29-31

As you read these verses, I want you to see that nothing is too significant that God is unaware of it or uninvolved in it. Without God's expressed decree and permission, even a sparrow doesn't die. Even the insignificant things God is aware of . . . like the number of hairs on our head. From this we should be able to conclude that God is there and is involved with us and our experiences. He is aware of our triumphs and successes. He is there for us during our trials and sufferings. This is always true, even if we can't sense His guiding presence or fail to understand what He is doing or why He is doing it.

## **Connecting This to the Cross**

The Bible does not say specifically whether God knew mankind would fall into sin. He created humans with the freedom of choice and God understood what possibilities that would involve. We are also not told whether God had a plan for humans had we not chosen to sin. The bottom line is that we did sin which led to our separation from God and ultimate eternal death. We should be very thankful that God had a plan for our redemption. He was not caught flat-footed. In fact, Ephesians 1.4 reveals:

For he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless in love before him.

– Ephesians 1.4

This verse reveals that God came up with the plan from before the beginning of the world. Subsequent verses in Ephesians 1 use the word *purpose* (v. 9, 11). God had “a setting forth, plan, purpose, or will” with regard of redeeming us and restoring the fellowship sin destroyed in the garden. With regard to the accomplishment of this task, *God works out everything in agreement with the purpose of His will*, 1.11. This is so certain to become reality that Paul speaks as if it has already happened:

We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; and those he called, he also justified; and those he justified, he also glorified.

– Romans 8.28-30

The *all things* in v. 28 refer to the spread of the gospel and our ultimate redemption . . . freedom from sin (8.1-2); life with the Spirit (8.12-17); the sufferings of a life in Christ which lead to glory (8.17-18); our groanings in hope and patience as we wait for the realization of our hope (8.19-22); and the help of the Spirit in our weakness (8.26-27).

## Conclusion

God's purposes never fail. There is proof of this all over both Testaments. As we trace the story, beginning in Genesis 3.16, God works to preserve mankind; exalt a family that grows into a nation; move inside nations; and communicate to a stubborn people beset with sin; leading them and guiding them all the way to the birth of the Savior.

Our God is not disconnected. He is not unplugged. He is not aloof and distant. He is very alive and very into your life.

## For Thought and Reflection

1. After mankind's fall into sin, how long does it take for God to enact His plan of redemption?
2. What does 1 Peter 1.10-12 teach regard the longing of the prophets of old and God's plan for a Messiah?
3. Why is it important for us to study the subject of providence, especially when it comes to learning more about our salvation?
4. How would you define *providence*?
5. What is an example of God's *general* providence?
6. What are some examples of God's *specific* or *special* confidence?
7. Does God's providence negate our freewill?



8. What is God's ultimate goal with us? (Ephesians 1.4)
  
9. How is God working to accomplish this goal? (Ephesians 1.8-11)
  
10. How certain is it that God will accomplish His purpose? (Romans 8.28-30)
  
11. How does the fact of God's constant care and attention ... to the smallest details of your life ... bring you comfort and peace?