

GEORGE WASHINGTON

Topic: Providence

Prepared by Ted W. Fuson and Deborah Upton as the first of seven topical studies in the Summer of 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic for Bon Air Baptist Church

This the first of seven studies based on Scripture and Eric Metaxas' 7 Men and 7 Women and the Secret of Their Greatness, Nelson Books, 2013, 2015, & 2016.

Some Scripture References:

Psalm 103:19—The Lord has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all.

Psalm 119:105—Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

Matthew 6:10—Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Romans 8:28—We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

Romans 11:33, 36—O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! ... For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen.

1 Corinthians 15:27a—For God has put all things in subjection under his feet (Jesus Christ).

Ephesians 1:11—In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will....

2 Timothy 3:16-17—All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

The Scripture verses printed above are only eight of many others that indicate that God is supreme in guiding the affairs of men. Read them and consider the surrounding passage of each one.

This topic is the providence of God. The term providence is not in scripture.

Let's begin with a definition of the term providence.

Wayne Grudem in his Systematic Theology, page 315, defines it as follows:

God is continually involved with all created things in such a way that he (1) keeps them existing and maintaining the properties with which he created them; (2) cooperates with created things in every action, directing their distinctive properties to cause them to act as they do; and (3) directs them to fulfill his purposes.

Fatalism is the idea that everything that has happened had to happen and that everything that will happen is supposed to happen. This means that God's relationship to creation is controlled by the choices of mankind and the action of his creation in keeping with the properties of creation. In other words, God is limited once creation began. It would mean that evil or the Devil's power is equal to and sometimes superior to that of the Creator. Deism and fatalism reflect this thinking and do not represent biblical theology.

Biblical theology presents God as involved in creation, controlling creation, and inserting himself in creation with his people, the Hebrews, and in supremely in Jesus, the Messiah (Christ). We call that the Incarnation, God in man. Jesus was both God and man. Thus, Deism and fatalism are not the biblical understanding of the providence of God. God works in everything according to his purposes so that even evil and sin, natural disasters, or accidents as we call them cannot inhibit his ultimate purposes.

At any moment we often cannot understand events. Time to God is eternal. To us time is past, momentary, and future. God is—"I am who I am." (*Exodus 3:14*) He is involved all the time, past, present, and future. His providence is active all the time. Only by his Spirit can we understand the ways of God. (See *1 Corinthians 2:1-16*.)

Wayne Grudem's definition is classic and thorough. However, I propose this statement regarding the providence of God in Jesus Christ by the power the Holy Spirit working in Creation and in all who by faith follow Jesus as Lord and Savior:

God's Providence: God can and will complete his purpose in his creation regardless of what we observe or experience at any moment in time. Pain, evil, sin, disaster, accident, et cetera are not the will of God, although he can and will work in and through them. They cannot ultimately threaten his purpose which is to redeem all creation showing his love to all generations. (See *Romans, Chapter 8*.)

So then, how can we explain the providence of God when everything seems to be going wrong as we experience it? Answer: consider the cross and resurrection of Jesus. There, our Father defeated the last enemy, death, by going through it and conquering it. So by faith in him, we can experience the same. (See *John 14:15-17, 26-27; 2 Corinthians 1:8-9, 5:7, 12:10; Galatians 6:9; Philippians 4:12-13; Colossians 1:15-20; and Hebrews 1:1-3.*)

Looking at George Washington's belief in providence, see pages 24, 25, 29, 30-37, and 44-49 in the book including men and women (pages 4, 5, 7, 10-17 and 24-29 in the single book of men, only). There you read evidence that Almighty God worked in the life of Washington to lead our fore fathers to found our nation. It led James Thomas Flexner to title his biography of our first president, Washington: The Indispensable man. John Adams believed Washington was the only man who could lead our new nation.

This wonderful chapter by Metaxas gives us text and context to discuss the providence of God in the founding of our nation and the leadership of George Washington. See Chapter one in your book.

Further, it provides us a place to begin in discussing the providence of God in the politics and activities of our lives, of our nation, and of our world.

The following questions are meant to open the discussion:

1. Was it the providence of God that led to your formation in your mother's womb? See Jeremiah 1:4-5, Psalm 139, Luke 1:34-45, John 1:6-8, and Genesis 15:1-6.
2. How is the Providence of God involved in the forming of our nation? Was Washington the only man God wanted to be our first president?
3. Was your marriage the will of God? Could you have married someone else in the providence of God? What about Washington marrying Martha, having slaves, and having no children of his own blood? Providential?
4. What about the Hebrews annihilating their enemies when conquering the holy land? Compare that with Jesus' teaching that we should love our enemies, et cetera?
5. How can we understand the providence of God in facing pandemics, earthquakes, tsunamis, calamities of nature, and accidents? Is there really such a thing as an accident? Or, is everything the direct result of the providence of God?

6. What scriptures best describe the character of God?
7. How has the providence of God been experienced in the calling of a pastor at BABC and the ending of a pastor's ministry at BABC? Other pastoral staff or support staff?
8. How do you know what God wants in your life daily or for the years to come? Generally? Specifically? How is your choice the providence of God, if it is? How is it not?
9. What did Jesus mean when he said, "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven?"

Appendix

Here are some quotes and their sources of Washington's reference to the providence of God. These twelve direct quotes are but a few of the numerous references by Washington to Divine Providence in his life and writings.

1. The Man must be bad indeed who can look upon the events of the American Revolution without feeling the warmest gratitude towards the great Author of the Universe whose divine interposition was so frequently manifested in our behalf. *Washington's Letter to Samuel Langdon, September 28, 1789*
2. May the same wonder-working Deity, who long since delivering the Hebrews from their Egyptian Oppressors planted them in the promised land—whose Providential Agency has lately been conspicuous in establishing these United States as an Independent Nation—still continue to water them with the dews of Heaven and to make the inhabitants of every denomination participate in the temporal and spiritual blessings of that people whose God is Jehovah. *Letter to the Hebrew congregation of Savannah, Georgia*
3. Glorious indeed has been our Contest: glorious, if we consider the Prize for which we contended, and glorious in is Issue; but in the midst of our joys, I hope we shall not forget that, to Providence is to be ascribed the Glory and the Praise. *Letter to Reverend John Rodgers, June 11, 1783*
4. I flatter myself that a superintending Providence is ordering everything for the best, and that, in due time, all will end well. *Letter to Landon Carter regarding American patriot's prisoners in the North, October 27, 1777*
5. It is not a little pleasing, nor less wonderful to contemplate, that after two years Manoeuvring and undergoing the strangest vicissitudes that perhaps ever attended any one contest since the creation both Armies are brought back to the very point now reduced to the use of the spade and pick axe for

defense. The hand of Providence has been so conspicuous in all this, that he must be worse than an infidel that lacks faith, and more than wicked, that has not gratitude enough to acknowledge his obligations, but it will be time enough for me to turn preacher, when my present appointment ceases; and therefore, I shall add not more on the Doctrine of Providence. *Private letter to Brigadier General Thomas Nelson, August 20, 1778*

6. What will be the consequences of our Arming for self defense, that Providence, who permits these doings in the Disturbers of Mankind; and who rules and Governs all things, alone can tell. To its all powerful decrees we must submit, whilst we hope that the injustice of our Cause if War, must ensue, will entitle us to its Protection. *Letter to Reverend Jonathan Boucher, August 15, 1798*
7. And also that we may then unite in most humbly offering our prayers and supplications to the great Lord and Ruler of Nations and beseech him to pardon our national and other transgressions, to enable us all, whether in public or private stations, to perform our several and relative duties properly... *Washington's thanksgiving Proclamation, October 3, 1789*
8. I now make it my earnest prayer, that God would...most graciously be pleas'd to dispose us all to do justice, to love mercy and to demean ourselves, with that Charity, humility & pacific temper of mind, which were the Characteristics of the Divine Author of our blessed Religion & without humble imitation of whose example in these things, we can never hope to be a happy nation. *Washington's Circular Letter to the States, June 8, 1783*
9. Whereas it becomes us humbly to approach the throne of Almighty God, with gratitude and praise for the wonders which his goodness has wrought in conducting our fore-fathers to this western world...and above all, that he hath diffused the glorious light of the gospel, whereby, through the merits of our gracious Redeemer, we may become the heirs of his eternal glory. *Washington's General Orders, November 27, 1779*
10. While I reiterate the professions of my dependence upon Heaven as the source of all public and private blessings; I will observe that the general prevalence piety, philanthropy, honesty, industry, and economy seems, in the ordinary course of human affairs particularly necessary for advancing and conforming the happiness of our country. *Answering a letter from the General Assembly of Presbyterian Churches in the United States, May 1789*
11. While we are contending for our own liberty, we should be very cautious not to violate the rights of conscience in others, ever considering that God alone is

the judge of the hearts of men, and to him... *Letter to Benedict Arnold, Thursday, September 14, 1775*

12. The ways of Providence being inscrutable, and the justice of it not to be scanned by the shallow eye of humanity, nor to be counteracted by the utmost efforts of human power or wisdom, resignation, and... *Letter to Colonel Bassett, Tuesday, April 20, 1773*