

WHAT IS PROVIDENCE?

by Derek W. H. Thomas

TO THE READER: A good learning technique is to answer the following questions BEFORE reading the booklet. After reading, you can refine your answers based on your reading. Then, when your group gathers, each can discuss his or her view and you can either affirm or modify what you wrote.

1. If God knows **everything** that is going to happen throughout time, and there is no way to change any of it, how are we any more than puppets? (5-7)
2. If you are not familiar with the book of Ruth, read these four short chapters. This book can be read from two views: God's big picture view from which He sees His long term plan for bringing about the birth of Jesus, and His short term view from which He leads Ruth throughout her life from one of obscurity to becoming the grandmother of King David, and an ancestor of Jesus.
Now read the story of Joseph in Genesis 37-50. Can you find the two views in Joseph's life? (7-14)
3. Can you show the two views in the story of Job? How did Job see his circumstances? How did God see them? (14-17)
4. **When** did God look ahead and see what would happen in the future? (17-22)
5. Let's rephrase question one this way: If God is sovereign (which He is) and knows everything (which He does), how does that affect the thought that you make free choices? (22-25)

6. When things go wrong, so many times we hear people say, “Why, God?” Why do people blame God when things don’t go the way we want? (25-27)

7. Why would God create man knowing he would sin? (28-29)

8. If God is sovereign and knows everything, why pray? (29-32)

9. Could God use the brutality of Alexander the Great as he conquered the world? Could God use to His glory the Roman armies who slaughtered countless numbers of people – even God’s people? (32-36)

After going through these questions, read the text and fill in the answers in preparation for class, noting other questions you might have. [By the way, if you do have any other questions about what you read, write them down here so you remember them at class time.]

APPLICATION

Carefully read Romans 8:28, especially the last part. Now read 2 Timothy 3:12. We confess our purpose is to glorify and enjoy God, but in reality we want only the good that goes with that. God’s purpose is to glorify Himself by establishing His Kingdom. To do that may mean suffering for us. The application here is not a typical one. This one is asking if you are truly willing to suffer for the Name of Christ. Most evangelism doesn’t spell that out up front, but it should. So here you are, being asked this question because it will ultimately prove what your true relationship to Christ looks like. Are you willing to pay the price of being His disciple, no matter what the cost? What needs to change in your life for that to happen? Make a plan!

For Further Study

Inconspicuous Providence: The Gospel According to Esther, Bryan R. Gregory. P&R, 2014.
The Invisible Hand: Do All Things Really Work for Good?, R. C. Sproul. P&R, 2003.

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