

One Nation Under God

Introduction. If you love your country, hearing that slogan ought to make a measure of gratitude well within you. The battle of Iraq is one victory in a war on terror that began on September 11, 2001 -- and still goes on. That terrible morning, 19 evil men -- the troops of a hateful ideology -- gave America and the civilized world a glimpse of their ambitions. They imagined, in the words of one terrorist, that September 11th would be the "beginning of the end of America." By seeking to turn our cities into killing fields, terrorists and their allies believed that they could destroy this nation's resolve, and force our retreat from the world. The outcome of this war demonstrates that they have failed.

When this campaign began on March 19, 2003, it was unlike any other in history. It was a campaign characterized by shock, surprise, flexibility, the employment of precise munitions on a scale never before seen, and by the application of overwhelming force. Operation Iraqi Freedom was carried out with a combination of precision and speed and boldness the enemy did not expect, and the world had not seen before. From distant bases or ships at sea, we sent planes and missiles that could destroy an enemy division, or strike a single bunker. Marines and soldiers charged to Baghdad across 350 miles of hostile ground in one of the swiftest advances of heavy arms in history. It consisted of the largest coalition of nations ever assembled -- almost 60.

When President Bush announced the ending of combat operations in Iraq aboard the USS Abraham Lincoln on May 1, 2003, he said, "The advance of freedom is the surest strategy to undermine the appeal of terror in the world. Where freedom takes hold, hatred gives way to hope. When freedom takes hold, men and women turn to the peaceful pursuit of a better life. American values and American interests lead in the same direction: We stand for human liberty."

As proud as we are for the job our troops and our President did, we come here today to consider another deeper possibility. That possibility can be described as the providence of God. Since the beginning of time, God's providential hand has been seen both in nature (Nehemiah 9:6; Matthew 5:45) and in the lives of individuals (Genesis 45:5-8; Matthew 10:29-31). But in this lesson, we are going to study God's providence in the realm of nations (Acts 17:26).

I. **A Definition Of Divine Providence**

- A. The term "providence" is derived from the Latin, *providentia*, signifying "foresight." The dictionary defines "providence" as "divine guidance or care; the God-conceived power which sustains and guides human des-

tiny." The word denotes the biblical idea of the wisdom and power which God continually exercises in the preservation and government of the world, for the ends which He proposed to accomplish.

- B. Providence concerns God's support, care, and supervision of all creation, from the moment of creation to eternity. The concept of providence is the opposite of "fate" or "chance" which sees world events as uncontrollable and without any element of benevolent purpose.
- C. At this point, two observations need to be made:
 - 1. God exercises care and control over the universe and its creatures as a whole. This can be called general providence.
 - 2. However, God also manifests care and control on behalf of His spiritual children. This can be referred to as special providence.

II. ***Principles For Understanding Divine Providence***

- A. God never providentially operates in any way that is in conflict with His revealed will.
 - 1. Since God is holy and righteous (Isaiah 6:3; Psalm 89:14), His acts of providence will always be consistent with these traits. For instance, God never tempts people to do evil (James 1:13-14), and thus one could never conclude that the Lord has ever providentially influenced men to do that which is wrong (Romans 9:17).
 - 2. Providence is implemented in harmony with God's will as revealed in the scriptures. This means that since God has revealed the conditions for the remission of sins (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38), one should never surmise that providence worked in saving man in some other fashion.
- B. Divine providence does not negate man's freedom of will.
 - 1. Contrary to the teachings of Augustine and Calvin (i.e., the notion that man is so depraved in sin that he has lost his power of choice), the Bible teaches the freedom of human will (Matthew 23:37; John 5:39-40; Revelation 22:17).
 - 2. By providence, therefore, God will not coerce a person to do either evil or good, but He can use people to accomplish the divine purpose in either capacity.
 - a) Because the wicked Assyrian had it in his heart to destroy, Jehovah used him as an instrument of wrath upon ancient Israel (Isaiah 10:5-7).
 - b) The Chaldeans were a bitter and hasty nation, yet God used them to punish His rebellious people (Habakkuk 1:5-11).
 - c) Pharaoh hardened his heart and rebelled against God (Exodus 8:15; 9:34). God then used that fact to demonstrate His power (Exodus 9:16).

- d) In John 11:47-52, Caiaphas' words demonstrate the relationship between divine providence and human responsibility.
 - e) The Lord may open doors of opportunity for the voluntary accomplishment of His will, but we must use our volitional faculties and step through (Acts 14:27).
- C. The providential must be distinguished from the miraculous.
1. A miracle is God's working on a plane that is above natural law; providence is His utilization of natural law. In a miracle, the Lord works directly; in providence, He operates indirectly, employing various means to accomplish a result.
 2. Notice some instances of God's operation -- both miraculous and providential:
 - a) Mary and Hannah.
 - (1) Mary's conception while yet a virgin was a miracle (Matthew 1:18).
 - (2) Hannah's son Samuel was providentially brought forth by means of the law of procreation (1 Samuel 1:19-20).
 - b) Hezekiah and Sennacherib.
 - (1) The Lord delivered Hezekiah from Sennacherib by sending an angel who miraculously killed 185,000 soldiers (Isaiah 37:36).
 - (2) The Lord providentially caused Sennacherib to fall by the sword in his own land (Isaiah 37:7, 38).
 - c) Jesus and Elijah.
 - (1) Jesus controlled the weather miraculously when He rebuked the winds and the sea (Matthew 8:26).
 - (2) After praying for rain, Elijah witnessed God providentially bringing rain to a drought-starved Palestine (1 Kings 18:44-45; James 5:16-18).
- D. In providence, God works behind the scenes.
1. A miracle, because of its nature, is designed to be demonstrable. It is an open, dramatic event. Even the enemies of the gospel could not deny the powerful signs performed by the apostles of Jesus (Acts 4:14-16).
 2. Notice some examples of God's providence in the punishing of other nations:
 - a) The Assyrians were instruments used to punish Judah, but God would punish them as well (Isaiah 10:5, 12-16, 24-26).
 - b) Judah would be taken away into captivity by the fierce Babylonians (Habakkuk 1:5-11).
 - c) Cyrus, the Persian king, delivered the kingdom of Judah from Babylonian captivity (Isaiah 44:28; 45:5; 46:9-11).

- d) The night of the Persian defeat of Babylon was foretold by Daniel. The Babylonians responded with a very blase attitude (Daniel 5:29). They had great walls but no spiritual strength.
- e) In Daniel 8:4-8, Daniel foretells of the activities of the ram (Medo-Persia) and the goat (Greece). All of this was foredetermined by God.
- f) It is fascinating to note that all these nations think they are doing their will, but they are really doing God's will. We need to keep that fact in mind as it relates to militant Islam in the world.

III. ***What Should Be Our Response To Divine Providence?***

- A. Seize every opportunity God gives us.
 - 1. God's providence does not encourage passivity. Some may have the idea that God is in charge, so they just sit back and wait for Him to act (Ecclesiastes 9:10; Galatians 6:9-10).
 - 2. Daniel took every advantage to advance in the kingdoms of Babylon and Persia, and with that advancement, served his God.
- B. Accept the affairs of life and trust God.
 - 1. Accept and enjoy life, and do not reject God's rule in this world through anger or unbelief (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8; Hebrews 3:12-14; 2 Corinthians 12:8-10).
 - 2. We can replace anxiety with trust because we know that God especially watches over His children (Matthew 6:25-34). This knowledge of God's providence will lead us to contentment (Exodus 2:21).
 - 3. There will be many problems in the tempest-tossed world, and the political climate can become very confusing, but we must be content that the Lord knows what He is doing and will bring it all to an end that will accomplish His purposes.
- C. Guard against bitterness.
 - 1. Evil always occurs in a sin-cursed world. In a war, innocent people and soldiers fighting for liberty and freedom die.
 - 2. Sometimes this fact causes bitterness (1 Samuel 1:5-10; Job 3:20; 7:11). We must be on guard for bitterness is fertile soil for Satan (Hebrews 12:15).
- D. Pray without ceasing.
 - 1. God is active in our lives and there is protection in prayer (Matthew 7:7-11).
 - 2. Pray for our rulers that wise decisions will be made (1 Timothy 2:1-3).
- E. Repent and live righteously.

1. All those nations used by God eventually fell themselves because of their own unrighteousness (Proverbs 14:34). Where does that leave America?
2. We will only continue to thrive as a nation if God blesses us. God will only bless us if we do not forget Him and do His will (Acts 17:30).
3. The reform of a society only truly occurs when enough people have reformed their lives. We need to make sure our families are straightened out and live righteously.

Conclusion. God rules in the kingdoms of men. Napoleon, at the height of his career, is reported to have given this cynical answer to someone who asked if God was on the side of France: "God is on the side that has the heaviest artillery." Then came the Battle of Waterloo, where Napoleon lost both the battle and his empire. Years later, in exile on the island of St. Helena, chastened and humbled, Napoleon is reported to have quoted the words of Thomas Kempis: "Man proposes, but God disposes." Indeed, God is able to work His sovereign will, despite what man may purpose. The dealings of God are not always evident on the surface, but there is always a purpose which time or eternity will reveal.

Ecclesiastes 3:8 says that there is "a time for war." In the images of celebrating Iraqis, we have also seen the ageless appeal of human freedom. Decades of lies and intimidation could not make the Iraqi people love their oppressors or desire their own enslavement. Men and women in every culture need liberty like they need food, water, and air. Everywhere that freedom arrives, humanity rejoices for no one is fit to be a master, and no one deserves to be a slave. Amir Taheri, the author of *The Cauldron -- The Middle East Behind the Headlines*, wrote in the London Times that acts of international terrorism fell by almost half from 2001 to 2002 -- to the lowest figure since 1969. Could this be the last gasp of the monster of international Islamic terrorism? Has God used our country to stop what could have been the strongest opposition to the gospel in centuries? Whether God continues to bless us may very well depend upon you and I.

On January 20, 2005, George W. Bush said, "We go forward with complete confidence in the eventual triumph of freedom. Not because history runs on the wheels of inevitability; it is human choices that move events. Not because we consider ourselves a chosen nation; God moves and chooses as He wills. We have confidence because freedom is the permanent hope of mankind, the hunger in dark places, the longing of the soul."

To see God's providential hand with true knowledge and certainty one must first know God Himself. It is interesting to note that God's greatest work of providence was seen in His Son Jesus (Acts 2:23; 3:18; 4:27-28). All nature and history moved to His hour of death and resurrection. This

providence with a view to salvation was meant for me and you. Take advantage of the opportunity now!