



Parameters of Providence

Lesson One: Who's To Blame?

Introduction. Life is filled with many things which happen to us that are difficult to bear. Being a Christian doesn't remove these difficulties, but in some cases actually presents new challenges to us.

- A. In considering the providence of God, we sometimes struggle with who is responsible for these difficulties. Is God to blame? Has He placed these obstacles before us? What responsibility do we have for our own difficulties? Is someone else responsible for these things?
- B. In this lesson we will look at five Scriptures which set parameters for us that can help us understand who is "to blame" for life's trials.

I. Why Do We Face Temptation? - "Nor does He Himself tempt anyone"

James 1:13. Read: James 1:13-15. It is easy to blame God for letting things happen to people.

Whether it be a hardship that we face or a temptation to sin which ensnares us, we are tempted to blame God for these things which we must endure.

- A. If God is the *direct* cause of trial or temptation then He would be directly responsible if the trial turns one from the faith. If He simply allows something His involvement would be *indirect*.
- B. The Holy Spirit reveals to us through James that we cannot blame God for trials and temptation since He does not "tempt anyone." It is God's desire that we be saved (II Peter 3:9).
- C. James does address, however, the role we have in our own temptations. Our own desires motivate us to sin (cf. II Peter 1:2-4). Some trials would be lessened by better control over our own desires.

II. Why Do Bad Things Happen in Life? - "Time and chance happen to them all" Ecclesiastes 9:11.

Read: Ecclesiastes 9:11,12. God created all things and knows all things, yet does His control over His creation mean that He, like a puppetmaster, continually manipulates and causes all things to happen?

- A. The book of Ecclesiastes is an exploration, by the "Preacher" (probably Solomon) of the realities of life and our accountability to God. He explores things as they appear "under the Sun."
- B. In the course of this exploration, the Holy Spirit reveals through the "Preacher" that there is such a thing as *chance*. If God reveals that some things happen by "chance" it indicates to us that not every aspect of this world involves God's direct involvement.
- C. By setting up the world to act according to certain laws and principles, *chance* interaction with things in this world can cause hardships. A rotting tree can fall by chance and hurt a passerby. A rock wet from rain can cause someone to fall and hurt themselves. God is not the *direct* cause of any of these things.

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III. Do We Have Freewill? - “Choose For Yourselves This Day” Joshua

24:15. Read: Joshua 24:14-16. If time and chance happen to all and God does not tempt anyone, but our own desires give force to the temptations, it follows that we have some measure of choice over things in this world.

- A. Man has through the centuries tried to deny that God has created man with any measure of freewill. If that were the case, then God would be responsible for all trials and temptations.
- B. Joshua declared to the people “choose for yourselves.” If man has no choice (but only the illusion of choice) these words are meaningless. Instead we all have the power to choose God or Satan, obedience or disobedience, sin or righteousness.
- C. Some things that happen to us happen because of our own choices. If I choose to drink and drive, when I am arrested I am to blame for the hardships that come from this choice (cf. I Samuel 8:18).

IV. How Do The Sins of Others Effect Us? - “Lest it become a snare in your midst” Exodus 34:12.

Read: Exodus 34:11-16. When the Israelites were to come into Canaan they were commanded not to allow the wicked nations that lived there to remain nor to make covenants with them. The danger of these people becoming a “snare” to the Israelites was very real.

- A. It is possible in our lives that the actions and sinful choices of those around us can effect us in frightening ways. The one who chooses to drive drunk and injures someone in my family may create immeasurable hardships for me, through no fault on my part.
- B. The warning of Exodus 34:12 shows us God in His providence, does not forcibly restrain the freewill choices of His creation to the point that the sinful actions of others cannot effect us.
- C. This shows us how important it is to make choices ourselves that guard ourselves against close relationships with those who could ensnare us, or at the very least add to our trials through their choices (cf. II Corinthians 6:14-17).

V. Is Satan to Blame? - “Satan hindered us” I Thessalonians 2:18.

Read: I Thessalonians 2:17-19. Paul tells the brethren in Thessalonica that his coming to them was “hindered” by Satan. It is unclear whether this was some direct type of Satanic influence (cf. Acts 16:16-18) or the efforts of evil men acting to do the will of Satan (cf. Acts 17:13-14).

- A. While Satan’s *direct* influence on believers is restricted in the Christian age (see Zechariah 13:1-2; Revelation 20:1-4), he clearly can present trial and temptation to us through others (cf. Matthew 16:23) and through our own desires which can follow the will of Satan (cf. John 8:44).
- B. It is appropriate for the Christian, as Paul exemplifies, to blame Satan for trials and temptations. This does not remove our own personal responsibility when it comes to resisting temptation. Nor does it discount the role that others can play in laying obstacles before us.

Conclusion. It is natural in times of hardship or failure to resist temptation to feel that God is to blame for allowing us to face such things. Job cried out: “why did I not die at birth?” (Job 3:11-12). Paul voiced the feelings of many: “why have you made me like this?” (Romans 9:20). We have seen in this study, while God *indirectly* allows us to face trials, He is not the *direct* cause of the things we must endure.