



Unseen Hand

Father and Son View Providence

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and
Gary C. Hampton**

**Publishing Designs, Inc.
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To all the men and women
who continue to labor far from home
because they firmly trust
in the providence of God.

My dad admired their dedication
and took special pleasure
in holding up their hands.
I continue to be challenged
by their ability to wait patiently
on the Lord.





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EDITOR'S PREFACE

ALMOST TWO YEARS HAVE PASSED since Gary Hampton contacted Publishing Designs about publishing a work on the providence of God, written by him and his father Robert. Upon reviewing that material, we agreed that their research would be a good addition to our brotherhood library, and that it might be of service to some who had been swallowed up in neo-pentecostalism.

Robert's and Gary's documents were consistent with each other. However, father's and son's writing styles differed. Robert used a laid-back style and Gary employed a rather punchy, concise style. Our task was to merge these styles and produce a book with compatible styles throughout, without compromising the words of either writer.

In December 2000, we were saddened by Robert's death. His work moved to a special place in our editing procedures. Gary moved quickly and cooperatively to assist in editing material that had become more special. His love for truth and for his father are obvious.

We have made every effort to leave Robert's material intact. Only a few sentences have been recast to assure clarity. Gary generously reworked his own material, deleting and rewriting biblical stories so as to avoid redundancies, smoothly merging his work with his father's.

Robert used the King James Version, except in Part Four, Chapter 1, where he used the New King James Version. Gary consistently used the New King James Version.

There are two kinds of providence: miraculous and non-miraculous. In this work, miraculous providence is described by the word *miracles*; non-miraculous providence is described by the word *providence*.

Publishing Designs thanks Gary Hampton, along with his wife Teresa, and all others who have read this work and offered suggestions, especially Rubye Davis and Dale Andrews.

We commend to you this work in praise of Almighty God, and with a prayer for its effective work in your hands.

—James B. Andrews, Editor
January 20, 2003



INTRODUCTION

IT MIGHT BE OF SOME INTEREST as to how I got started seriously thinking about divine providence. I have always believed in providence, at least a mental affirmation, yet I have not really understood everything I wanted to know. I have been unable to explain everything to my own satisfaction and I am sure not to the satisfaction of others.

About forty years ago Fred Patton, a friend with whom I had discussed the Bible hour after hour—his wife Wilma was a member of the church where I was preaching—made one statement that stuck with me through the years. He said, “It may be that what you are saying and showing me from the Bible is right, but your God seems just too far away, and I don’t think I would ever be able to reach Him.” That left an indelible impression upon my mind and caused me to reflect upon how far away is “my” God. In denying the miraculous I fear we give the impression that God is not active in the affairs of men today. This is regrettable.

There is another reason for my increased interest. In 1973 we were having problems with neo-pentecostalism in the area where I was preaching. The elders of the church and I, along with my co-worker, Charles Johnson, met with some other elders and a preacher concerning their teachings on these matters. During the course of our discussion the



preacher expressed the belief of the group: “My physical birth was a miracle. My becoming a Christian was a miracle. The sun rising and setting is a miracle.” Upon being questioned further, his line of reasoning was that anything and everything God had anything to do with was a miracle! This I did not believe, and as a result, I began to search the Scriptures anew and was again led into the subject of divine providence.

Then in the first part of 1975 I committed myself to teaching a series of five lessons on the subject of providence in the adult class in a vacation Bible school. I began looking for books and other material written on the subject. Finding none, I called the preachers in the area to see if they had anything that I might read. There was only one preacher who had one book with one short chapter on providence. So I began earnestly studying the subject of divine providence as revealed in the word of God. Excitement overwhelmed me, and my faith in the living God increased greatly.

In July 1978, I ran across a book titled *A Miracle a Day Keeps the Devil Away*. Its author claims that God is still performing miracles every day. He defines miracles as “the touch of God in our lives.” He believes that whatever God does is supernatural—a miracle—simply because God is doing it. And he further states that the only way God can answer prayer is by miraculous intervention.

In chapter 1 he tells about the first miracle he remembers. He was five years old, riding his tricycle in front of his house in Nashville, Tennessee. Pedaling furiously to build up speed, he turned to go down the sloped driveway into the street to gain more speed. Suddenly he was in midair watching his tricycle continue its journey down the drive, onto the street in front of an oncoming bus! His tricycle was demolished and he was being placed on the sidewalk by a teenage boy from up the street. He attributes this salvation to a miracle and disclaims the idea that it was simply the providence of God.



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In these studies I pray we can see a clear distinction between the miraculous and the providential; that we can realize the providential does not leave God out, but that God is involved in, interferes with, and interrupts our lives; He works in our behalf. But this does not necessitate a miracle. We will examine briefly some ideas pertaining to God's role in the universe today. Then we will ultimately examine some promises of God that can only be fulfilled by divine providence. We must first establish the fact that God is concerned with, and works in the affairs of men today.

—Robert C. Hampton







PART ONE



GOD'S POWER







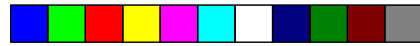
Chapter One

MIRACULOUS INTERVENTIONS

THE ATHEIST, IN HIS DENIAL THAT GOD EXISTS, very obviously does not believe that God rules in the affairs of men. He quite naturally eliminates any and all divine intervention.

The deist also denies that God superintends the affairs of His people. Although he believes God exists and that He created the world, the deist thinks that God set His laws in operation and retired to the heavens. The deist teaches that God is presently unconcerned with our immediate needs and will not interfere with the material world, and that when the universe runs its course, God will return to the scene and see how everything has worked out. So the deist perceives God to be somewhat like a child who builds something with an erector set, connects it to a motor, turns it on, and leaves the room to let it operate as it is designed to do. However, while it is operating he is totally disinterested. Finally he comes back to see how it all worked out. Deism leaves God out of all human affairs and makes Him an impersonal God, a God so far removed that He cannot be reached.

The fatalist on the other hand believes that all events are determined by fate instead of natural causes, and nothing that man wills or does affects the course of events.



The concept of fate underlying all theories of fatalism is (1) that destiny is a dead, blind power, and (2) that human liberty is completely and irresistibly controlled by destiny. Thus the fatalist sees all events as predetermined by God or the blind forces of nature; the course of one's life and the appointed minute of his death cannot be changed.

A common example of fatalism is that of a soldier's going into battle with the firm conviction that he will not meet his death a moment sooner than if he stayed home. A number of years ago there was a popular song: "Whatever Will Be, Will Be." This is fatalism.

However, we are most familiar with fatalism in the form of astrology. Those who believe in astrology think the events of a person's life are directly affected by the position of the stars and planets. To determine the events in a person's life, the astrologer must know the exact configuration of the heavens at the time of birth. In fatalism, man's freewill is completely eliminated, as is God's active participation in the affairs of men today.

And so the atheist, the deist, and the fatalist alike deny that God is continuously engaged in providing for His children. These ideas are totally incompatible with the teachings of the Bible.

What Is a Miracle?

On the other hand, and to the opposite extreme, some believe that God works directly and immediately in our lives by means of miraculous intervention. The word *miracle* is used very loosely today. It therefore becomes necessary for us to define the word as it is used in the Bible to describe events that were of supernatural origin. In the Bible no one ever denied a true miracle having been performed. They may have denied that it was done by the power of God, but not even the enemies of God denied the performance of a miracle.

Just what is a miracle? C. S. Lewis says in part: "A miracle is an interference with nature by supernatural power."



Smith's Bible Dictionary says,

An event which never could have been the result of the working of laws of nature as we understand them, but is of such extraordinary character that it requires for its cause the intervention of a supernatural being, i.e., an event which cannot be accounted for by any naturalistic cause.

Kittle's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* says,

Miracles are events in the external world, wrought by the immediate power of God and intended as a sign or attestation.

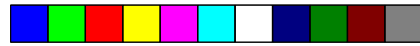
A good, concise definition of *miracle* is something that the laws of nature could not do in their ordinary course and operations.

God's Hand Seen in Two Births

For example, the laws of nature have never produced human life without the seed of a man and the seed of a woman. Even the test-tube babies have everything that God ordained as necessary to produce a child. However, Adam and Eve were produced without parents; hence, a miracle (Genesis 1:27; 2:7). And the reason the birth of our Lord was extraordinary was because a virgin conceived and a child was brought forth without a man's providing seed (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:18–25; Luke 1:31, 35). The seed was provided by the Holy Spirit. Jesus' advent was a miracle—a miraculous birth! And other than these two instances, all have come into the world because of obedience to the laws of nature, which God has set in operation.

The birth of Samuel, as recorded in 1 Samuel 1:9–20, illustrates God's providence. Here we find Hannah praying for a son. The Bible says Elkanah (her husband) knew her, the Lord remembered her, and she conceived. That word *knew* means he had intimate relations with her, just as "Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the Lord" (Genesis 4:1). And so Hannah, in answer to her prayer, which was accomplished through God's providence, gave birth to





Samuel. Elkanah and Hannah were obedient to God's divine law of procreation. The Lord worked "behind the scene." In harmony with His divine law, and according to those laws of nature which He had set in operation, He provided a child. Denying that a miracle occurred in either of these cases does not mean that we must deny any and all divine intervention. For to say that life is produced without a miracle is not excluding God. But it is to recognize and obey laws that God set in operation. These are irrevocable divine laws which must be obeyed if a child is to be produced.

Jesus' Undeniable Miracles

It isn't a miracle for an oak tree to produce an acorn or an acorn to produce an oak tree. But it would be a miracle to produce an oak tree without an acorn or an acorn without an oak tree. It takes life to produce life and every kind produces after its own kind.

Miracles performed by our Lord were undeniably miracles. They could not be explained by the laws of nature in its ordinary course and operations; they were not so-called healing miracles of some unseen or imagined ailment. They were obviously supernatural acts, and sometimes verified inadvertently by those who called Him a sinner, and also by those who did not know or believe that He—Jesus—was the Son of God. But that a miracle had been done they could not and did not deny.

John 9:1 says, "And as Jesus passed by, He saw a man which was blind from his birth." In verse 6, Jesus did something rather unusual:

He spat on the ground and made clay of the spittle, and He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay, and said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam, (which is by interpretation, Sent.) He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing.

Neighbors and others who had known him said it was he, while some said, "He is like him," but the former blind man said, "I am he" (John 9:9).



Some of the Pharisees said,

This man is not of God, because He keepeth not the Sabbath day. Others said, How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles? And there was a division among them (John 9:16).

Notice the division resulted because an undeniable miracle had been performed, and they had already concluded that He was not from God; but they were unable to explain how a sinner could have worked a miracle.

And not being able to deny the miracle, they tried to prove the sighted man could not have been the blind beggar. So they called his parents to ask them. In verses 20 and 21 they affirmed that they knew the one “seeing” was their son; and they knew he was born blind, but they did not know how his eyes were opened or who had opened them. So they said, “Ask our son, he is of age.” Then they called the man that had been blind, and said unto him, “Give God the praise.” For what, we might ask? For a miracle!

Did this blind man receive his sight according to the natural, ordinary course and operation of known laws? No, he received his sight by the setting aside of natural law. Could just any blind person come seeing after having clay put on his eyes and then washing in the pool of Siloam? Why certainly not!

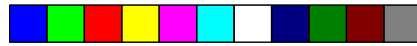
Furthermore, we don’t have miracles like this being performed today. God no longer works in this manner. If any claims that He does, then let him heal a known blind man.

The Apostles’ Undeniable Miracles

Acts 3 records another indisputable miracle, one that was performed by an apostle of Jesus Christ. As Peter and John went up to the temple at the hour of prayer, a man lame from his mother’s womb, who was carried and laid daily at the gate of the temple, asked an alm. Peter replied,

Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I thee: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. And he leaping up





stood, and walked, and entered with them in the temple, walking and leaping, and praising God . . . And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which happened unto him (Acts 3:6–10).

So by some supernatural, extraordinary, divine manifestation of power, this man—who for more than forty years had been unable to walk—immediately was able not only to stand, but to leap and walk. “All men glorified God for that which was done” (Acts 4:21). Those not His disciples acknowledged “that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it” (Acts 4:16). “They could say nothing against it” (Acts 4:14).

No doctor had performed surgery, no therapy had been administered, and no long healing process had been observed. That would be the normal procedure. But he was immediately and instantaneously healed and able to walk on legs, ankles, and feet that had never borne his weight. That was a miracle—one unlike what can be seen anywhere today. I have a sister who cannot walk. One leg is shorter than the other. Let someone come forth and heal her if miracles are being performed today by God's power. All healings that were supernaturally and miraculously done in the New Testament were instantaneous and complete. In the case just noted, it was indisputably performed on a man whom all knew.

Providence Defined

Now let us look at the providential. God still works in this realm today. What is providence? Providence is God's working in accord with His divine, established, and irrevocable laws. The difference in the miraculous and the providential is that God works through, and by means of His divine laws in the providential, and He sets aside (or goes beyond) law in the miraculous. Just how and to what extent God, in His providence, may overrule and direct the lives of



His children, I cannot say. Our part is to follow the directions of the dictates of the Holy Spirit through the word of God and trust Him, accepting His promises by faith and knowing that He can and will fulfill them.

Men may speculate on how the Spirit intervenes on behalf of the child of God, but the fact remains that God does not work miraculously through the Spirit today. He works providentially.

In providence He works behind the scenes or in ways that man can never be sure of today. We cannot fully understand or comprehend His workings. We may credit it to the Father, but since we have no revelation from the word on that point, we have no idea how it is accomplished.

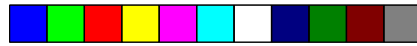
God is near us, over us, and about us constantly. It should strengthen our faith to realize that the Father is vitally and specifically interested in every one of us. He even knows the most intimate and secret details of our lives (Matthew 10:30).

The Eunuch and Providence

The eighth chapter of Acts provides an example of divine providence. Philip, a servant of the Jerusalem church, had gone down to Samaria and preached Christ. While there a wonderful thing happened.

The angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet. Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him (Acts 8:26–31).





Notice these facts. The law of nature, or natural law, says that if the eunuch leaves Jerusalem for Gaza he will pass by an intersection of the road which comes down from Samaria.

Also, according to the laws of nature, if Philip leaves Samaria on a road which intersects with the highway which goes from Jerusalem to Gaza, he will arrive at that intersection.

Taking it one step further, it is possible for the eunuch to leave Jerusalem and Philip to leave Samaria and arrive at this crossroad intersection at the same time—without any miraculous intervention. And this they did. Others, no doubt, had done the same thing without any divine intervention.

However, this meeting was not accidental, but neither was it miraculous. An angel simply commanded Philip and he obeyed. He arrived, by normal means, where God wanted him. A miracle would have been performed if God had lifted either one or both men up and set them down together at the crossroads. But in denying a miracle, we do not have to deny divine intervention. Providence is God's providing. And He provided a proclaimer of truth for a truth-seeker. Jesus said, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Matthew 7:7).

An Example of God's Unseen Hand

We cannot prove God's workings of providence in our lives today, but we can believe that He is assuredly working behind the scenes to accomplish the fulfillment of His promises. A true story will illustrate the characteristics of the workings of divine providence.

Two men of my acquaintance in Plymouth, Michigan, worked in separate places at the same factory. Gray was a member of the church where I preached. Murray, along with his wife Florence, had been studying the Bible and searching for the truth. Over a period of months they had attended services at almost every church in town. At each place they had asked the minister questions concerning what they



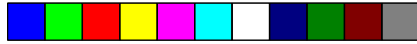
must do to be saved, but had not found one who told them what the Bible taught. They became discouraged and had determined to quit searching. About three weeks later Murray reported for work on a Friday night, and because of so many being absent from work, he was loaned out to another department. At the same time Gray was also loaned out to the same department and placed at a machine next to Murray.

During the course of working beside each other, Gray and Murray discussed the Bible, and Murray related the story I've just told. Gray invited Murray to attend services with him on Sunday. After much urging he finally agreed to come. Sunday morning came and Murray was not present, so Gray called him. He promised to attend the evening service. True to his word, Murray came. He heard the gospel preached, he believed it, and he was baptized into Christ that very night. At a later time his wife also obeyed the gospel.

It is my conviction that all this came about by God's divine providence—that God intervened in the lives of these two men. Nothing miraculous took place, nothing out of the ordinary occurred. Many men were loaned to other departments that night. But I believe with all of my heart that God was working behind the scenes—that it was no accident when these two men were placed side by side. How God was able to bring this about I do not understand, but I do not doubt that He did.

—Robert C. Hampton



**Discussion Questions**

1. Give a good definition of *miracle* and tell about a miraculous birth.
2. Tell about a non-miraculous birth which was nonetheless an answer to prayer.
3. What miracle did Jesus work which even His enemies could not deny?
4. Tell about an undeniable miracle worked by an apostle.
5. Define *providence*. How was it involved in the eunuch's meeting with Philip?





Chapter Two

IT'S A MIRACLE?

THE BIBLE IS INDEED FILLED WITH ACCOUNTS of miracles, acts so incredible that, on one occasion, Jesus' enemies attempted to explain His miracle by attributing it to Beelzebub, the ruler of devils.

But is God in His incessant work limited to miracles? Does He work by natural law? If not, what is the purpose of natural law? Is it possible for one to survive a terrible automobile accident without God's miraculous intervention? Is the sun's rising and setting miraculous? While few deny that these are great events in which God works, some go a step further and insist that God's miraculous hand is involved. But every rational person knows that He gave the rescue personnel the intelligence to learn how to help people. He set the sun in the heavens and set the world in a revolving orbit. But can one truly say any of these things is a miracle?

A miracle has been described as follows:

An extraordinary manifestation of divine power, operating either independently of the laws and forces of nature, as in the original creation, or in opposition to them, as in the separation of the waters of the Red Sea, or in connection and harmony with them, as in the Noahic deluge (Robert Milligan, *The Scheme of Redemption*, 263).