

## **God, Pandemic, Election**

Genesis 45:4-8, 50:20; Acts 4:25-28

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As this pandemic drags on and we are headed towards one of the most contentious and chaotic elections in recent memory, many of us restlessly worry about our health, the economy, our families, and society as a whole. What perspective should we have as Christians in the midst of this adversity? Surely, we should do our part by voting and abiding by health guidelines. However, we must acknowledge that ultimately God is in control. We don't know the future, but right now we can trust that God is omniscient, omnipotent, and completely good. God's providence is always at work. Providence is God's continuous action to preserve creation and guide it to His intended purpose, to bring about His plan of salvation and renewal. Providence isn't just foreseeing the future, but actively and prudently making preparations to ensure it happens His way. It means bringing good out of the evil in the world. This theme is very prominent in the Bible, and if we truly understand it, we can be assured that things don't just happen by chance, but that God is present and active in our lives, that He is involved, and that God hears and acts on our prayer.

Today we will examine two case studies of God's providence from the Bible. The first is the story of Joseph in Genesis 37-50. It's a story about how God brings about good in the end, despite difficulties and the worst intentions of others. Recall that Jacob favored Joseph, which led his jealous brothers to plot against Joseph, throwing him in a pit, and eventually selling him into slavery in Egypt, where he gained favor in Potiphar's house, only to be thrown in prison because he refused the advances of Potiphar's vindictive wife. In prison he interpreted the dream of Pharaoh's chief cupbearer, who after being restored forgot about Joseph until Pharaoh himself had strange dreams. When Joseph is brought before Pharaoh, he is able to interpret the dream, but credits God who reveals to him the interpretation, as He revealed to Pharaoh the seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine in order to save Israel and all of Egypt (41:16-39). Joseph is placed over all of Egypt and helps save them from starvation. When Jacob's family finally goes to Egypt for grain, and Joseph reveals himself at last, he says three times in 45:4-8 that it was God who sent him to Egypt. And after Jacob's death, Joseph is able to forgive and comfort his fearful brothers by telling them that although they meant it for evil, God meant it for good (50:20). His brothers were fully responsible and had evil intentions, but God is fully

sovereign and had good intentions, to save Jacob's house, fulfilling His promise to Abraham and Isaac to make Israel a great nation. In the midst of both good and evil God is in control. All good comes from Him, but evil comes from the curse of sin, yet He can turn that evil into good. God can work all things out for good, so that His purpose prevails. This is His providence.

The story of Joseph points us to the second case study, which is the death and resurrection of Jesus. In Acts 4, after Peter and John face persecution, the church prays, first confessing God's sovereignty in their persecution. Then in 4:25-28 they remember God's sovereignty in Jesus' death by quoting Psalm 2, in which God revealed that there would be rebellion against Him and His Anointed. God's enemies conspired against Jesus as they conspire against the early church. Herod, Pilate, and the Sanhedrin conspired against Jesus out of a desire to preserve their power and out of jealousy, just like Joseph's brothers. They held a farce of a trial and executed Jesus. Yet in v. 28 we see that this was all predestined by God. Though they opposed God, everything they did was according to His will. We see this in John 11:47-52, when Caiaphas says that Jesus should die to save the nation of Israel. Though he intended Jesus' death to save his own power and save Israel from destruction by the hands of the Romans, God meant it to save the world from sin and death. God turns evil into good, and His will prevails. We see this even at the cross. In Matthew 27:42 the mockers say that Jesus saved others but cannot save Himself. The reality is that in order to save others, Jesus refused to save Himself. They thought He was incapable of saving Himself, but in reality, He was unwilling to do so. He resolutely chose to die for us out of love and obedience. Jesus died willingly in accordance to God's will, His plan of redemption, and His just righteousness which required a penalty for sin. This is how God demonstrates His love. It was the power of love, not the power of nails, that held Jesus to the cross. Love compelled God to save us through Jesus' death. And just as with Joseph, He raised Jesus up, giving Him authority over all, and giving us hope of ultimate salvation. Let us take comfort in the fact that God continually acts to bring about His purposes, and that He can bring good out of evil. For He proved it to us in the cross of His Son Jesus Christ.