

GOD'S PROVISION AT THE APPOINTED TIME

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And Samuel said, "Here is what has been reserved! Set it before you and eat, because it has been kept for you until the appointed time. . . ." (1 Sam. 9:24).

Saul was astonished to find himself sitting in the place of honor at a banquet, receiving from the prophet Samuel the choice portion of meat. Of the least family of the smallest tribe, the idea of being king was inconceivable. In a moment, however—the moment of the "appointed time"—God changed his life forever.

Scripture describes many of these significant "appointed times." Appointed to a position of authority, Esther "attained royalty for such a time as this" (Esther 4:14). Appointed to judgment, Pharaoh was raised up to demonstrate God's power (Romans 9:17). As "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world," Jesus had an appointment at the cross.

Saul felt he was assuming an unwarranted place of honor at the feast. But Samuel knew it was the appointed time to choose a king. Thus the appointed times of our lives have been set by God to remind us of His broader purposes, not only in this life, but also in the life to come. In reviewing some old journals, I saw numerous recurring themes—needs and prayers that continued to surface over and over again. And with the approach of each new year, I wonder if some "appointed time" of fulfillment might finally be at hand.

The subject of God's providence reveals that the difference between our thoughts and God's thoughts is great (cf. Is. 55:8-9). We tend to focus only on the immediate circumstances, but God is carrying out plans He formed long ago. We judge by outward appearances, but God's eye is on the heart. We seek speedy resolutions to our difficulties, but God is often more interested that we learn patient endurance.

While circumscribing our physical lives, these "appointed times" should also exert considerable influence on how we spend them. Consider Paul as an example. With the vision of imperishable crowns before him, Paul ran the race of life as if to win (1 Cor. 9:24). Why? He was acutely aware that despite the personal trials and triumphs appointed by God for his earthly life, God's calendar promises even greater "appointed times" in the future.

We should all think like Paul. We should learn to live with the awareness of "appointed times" always before us. The time of our death is appointed (Heb. 9:27). The day and hour of Christ's return, and the resurrection of the dead, is set (Matt. 24:35). Each of us has an appointment before the judgment seat of Christ to provide a full accounting of how we have lived (2 Cor. 5:10). With these "appointed times" in mind, every day and every hour should be lived thoughtfully, righteously, and energetically.

In reality, every moment of every life is an "appointed time." Nothing happens, either big or little, that has not been appointed by God. Not even a sparrow falls to the ground apart from God's providence (cf. Matt. 10:29). "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord" (Prov. 16:31). But God often provides us with noteworthy events and circumstances that have a greater impact. Whether we're exalted or humbled by the appointed times that mark our lives in important ways, they are reminders of the momentous appointments yet to come. We should thus live circumspectly, and prepare for them.

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