

JEHOVAH JIREH: *The Shepherd Who Provides Then and Now*



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ABSTRACT: *Jehovah Jireh is a common name for God; it is in songs, sermons, and inspirational wall decor. It can often be simple to look at one's own life and point to times that support God as Jehovah Jireh. This paper, however, seeks to draw connections between the Bible and contemporary life to show how God's providence extends through all of time. The study begins with an examination of two biblical examples of God's providence—Psalm 23 and James 1—followed by a summary of five interviews with people in different places of life. The analysis of the biblical pictures of God's providence help establish an experience of God that is then confirmed through the interviews. A new perspective on the interpretation of 'doubt' became an unexpected, but thought-provoking factor. The research revealed the desired result of showing how God's providence can be connected through the pages of Scripture and daily life.*

KEYWORDS: *Psalm 23, James 1, Jehovah Jireh, God's Providence*

Introduction

God's providence flows off the pages of Scripture and into personal lives with the authority of an omnipotent God. Scripture demonstrates how Jehovah Jireh—The LORD will Provide—cares for His flock time and time again in ways unique to them. Psalm 23 portrays God the provider as a shepherd. Shepherds would give anything to and do anything for their sheep. In the New Testament, James sees this connection between God and a shepherd as well, considering this protection as a one of many gifts given to God's people. There are many connections given throughout Scripture expanding on God's character as provider, but the true impact is felt when Scripture is seen off the pages. His unchanging qualities appear when looking into the lives of Christians of any age. The depth of God's providence can be seen through the Psalm's depiction of a shepherd, James' generous gift-giver, and today's answered prayers.

The Biblical Picture

King, solid rock, strong fortress, jealous, and almighty are some of the many names and descriptions given to God in the Old Testament. There is often a focus on His power and zeal that can be seen through how His mighty presence is presented. As both transcendent and immanent, the

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characteristics of God's love are addressed through names such as peace, father, and healer. The vastness of His attributes causes His people to call Him a multitude of names, one of which is Jehovah Jireh. The term 'Jehovah Jireh' is first used for God in Genesis 22:14, right after God provides a ram for Abraham to sacrifice instead of sacrificing his son, Isaac. After this example of providence, God continues to demonstrate this attribute numerous times throughout Scripture, from providing food for His people wandering the desert to feeding the crowds who came to hear Jesus preach. God's desire to provide is essential to His nature, as it ties in directly with His immanence and relationship with humanity. This can be illustrated in different ways in two passages: Psalm 23 and James 1.

Psalm 23

Psalm 23 starts by relating God to a shepherd, which may appear odd to people in the twenty first century, but it was a common occupation at that time. David outlines through this metaphor how God loves, protects, and takes responsibility of His people. A shepherd has to be constantly attentive to their sheep, protecting them and keeping them from straying off the right path. A shepherd leads their sheep to good pastures for feeding, and calm waters for drinking. All day and night, a shepherd actively watches their flock and provides for them. A shepherd is very intimately connected with the flock, as the shepherd "lives with his flock and is everything to it: guide, physician, and protector" (Kidner, 1973, p. 127). Just as sheep lack nothing because of their shepherd, David states that he lacks nothing because of God (Ps. 23:1). He makes the connection that a good shepherd is a good provider.

In the following verses, David lists ways that God provides both physically and non-physically. He starts by highlighting the necessities that God provides: He gives His sheep green pastures and still waters (v. 2). As a provider, the first things that must be provided are the basic needs of an individual: food, water, and rest. David acknowledges this and begins his list in a way that maintains his metaphor of God as a shepherd. A sheep feeds on plants, so David paints a picture of a lush, green pasture—rolling hills of soft, green grass for sheep to eat and rest in happily. David does not end there, however, because not only does God provide the best sustenance, He provides the best water as well. This fresh, cool water rejuvenates the body and awakens the soul. This stream is described in a way that enhances the description of peace David has provided. Quiet water flows by, adding to the peaceful atmosphere provided by God. He made the gentle lapping of water touching the grassy shore, and the soft sound of water breaking around rocks to continue the flow down river. These are sounds provided by a good shepherd for the enjoyment of His flock. This is the atmosphere provided to encourage rest for a tired soul.

David finishes listing the basic needs and moves on to describe how God goes beyond the basics. After giving the reader an illustration of how God provides for his people's needs in a way no other can, the psalmist mentions how God refreshes souls (v. 3). He sees past the physical and provides for the spiritual wellbeing of a person as well. There are times when the physical body of a person is doing well, but their spiritual side is unhealthy. Humans cannot see past the physical, so their care can only extend so far. God does not have these limitations, seeing every aspect of need a person has. He provides rest for a tired body, food for a starving stomach, but also rejuvenation for a struggling soul. God's providence is not limited to the physical or mental; rather, it reaches to the deep crevasses of the person's spirit and offers the soul rest and refreshment.

Beyond the physical and spiritual areas for which God provides care, David looks also at how God provides His presence for us. After looking into the nourishment, rest, and refreshment God gives, the psalm goes on to discuss how God is present in the darkest valleys and guides the psalmist along the right paths (v. 3, 4). Other translations call it the "valley of the shadow of death" (Ps. 23:4, NASB), which adds depth to this image painted by David. It is not merely a dark valley, but a valley where death creates the darkness. This valley that the psalmist describes walking through is one so dark that a person cannot see others around them, or even their own hands if placed in front of their face. In this moment of sheer panic and loneliness, God shows up with a presence so brilliant that it breaks

through death's darkness. God not only leads people to the right paths, but He also lights it for them. People sometimes use this verse metaphorically to reference God's presence throughout mental health struggles. When looking at the entire picture painted, the connection seems justified. Not only does God shine bright in the darkness of one's personal struggles, but he provides the peace of a restful meadow, sustenance to survive any low time, and direction to get through the valley. He rejuvenates the body, soul, spirit, and mind. He walks the darkest paths of the valley with them, never leaving their side. God provides every possible need a person could have, extending this care to giving companionship and light in darkness.

James 1

In the New Testament, there are countless times where God's providence is evident through miracles and incredible feats of God. James provides a more subtle, but no less powerful, approach to discussing how God provides for His people. The New Testament is filled with healings, redemptions, and rescues that prove how God does not fail His people, but James does not dwell long on this topic. He drops mentions of God's providence throughout his letter, never focussing on it too long, because it is a basic fact to him. It is as obvious to him as waking up is to people. A person does not stop to explain that they woke up that day, because it is so abundantly clear. With this approach, James addresses God as Jehovah Jireh by stating that He gives "generously and without reproach" (James 1:5, NASB). The word 'generous' originates from the Greek word 'haplos', which can mean "simply, sincerely, or abundantly" (Brannan, 2020). All of these words serve to enhance the concept of a generous God, but each of them does so in a slightly different way. The word 'simply' in this context does not imply that God gives simply, but that God simply gives. This slight difference separates average gifts with a profound characteristic of God. To simply give implies it is done unconditionally and without hesitation. The word 'sincerely' leads the reader to understand that God does not give with ulterior motives or with ill intention. When God gives His people something, He does so out of a desire to provide the best for them, knowing they could never repay Him to any extent. Lastly, the word 'abundantly' guides the reader to remember how James claims that every "good thing and every perfect gift is from above" (James 1:17). This connection is a reminder that God not only gives and provides for His people, but He holds nothing back. God provides for his people in an unconditional, overflowing way. Instead of choosing one from the list of three true descriptions of God's giving, James chooses the word that encompasses all of them. His choice in terms leads the reader to understand God's generosity as a "simple, open, sincere action" (Richardson, 1997, pp. 64). Haplos was chosen as the word to use because it described the abundance and simplicity of God's generosity, which is then followed with a claim of "certainty of receiving wisdom from God" (Richardson, 1997, p. 65). There is no doubting God's generosity, nor is there questioning His motives. James makes it clear with his word choice that God wants to give this wisdom to His people, and that studying every angle of his generosity reveals its purity.

The second description of God's providence is often overlooked and blindly connected with the first. God gives to His people without reproach (v. 5). He does not express criticism, but gives without reservation. There is no blame placed on those who lack this gift of wisdom that James is discussing. He paints a picture of a God who sees His flawed, imperfect people, and chooses to give them His gifts despite their lack. God does not look at these people and criticize why they lack wisdom, or why it took them so long to ask for it. Instead, He gives abundantly, glad that His people have come to Him asking Him to provide. James says that God has what people lack, and He wants to provide for that lack. Jehovah Jireh gives joyfully and without reservation.

Contemporary life

Primary Research

In order to learn more about the connection between asking for and receiving wisdom in contemporary life, five interviews were conducted. The interviews consisted of a few questions about a time in the person's life when they asked God for wisdom. They were asked questions such as, "what led to this request for wisdom, and what was the result" as well as questions regarding the role doubt played. The questions were asked with the intention of determining the relationship between doubt and the journey to receiving wisdom. In an attempt to understand more than one perspective, this narrative analysis focused on people currently living at different stages in their lives. Among the interviewed people, there was a new mother finishing college, a young husband searching for a pastoral position, a middle-aged mother returning to college in search of a deeper relationship with God, a man with a doctorate who both teaches and preaches, and a man with a doctorate who used to teach and preach. These different stages, ranging from people beginning their careers to people ending theirs, demonstrate a multitude of perspectives on God's providence.

Similarities in Interviews

Going into each interview, I had an expectation of where the conversations would lead. Personal reflection had me believing that the interviews would support the opinion that God follows through, even as there is doubt in Him. When first reading James 1:6, I understood that the doubt James talks about is translated to be doubt in God: in His hearing one's request, His generosity, and His giving of wisdom. Overall, my opinion entering the interviews was that this doubt discussed was in God's willingness to follow through. My biggest assumption going into the interviews was that each interviewed person would share this doubt on some level. Ultimately, the aspect of doubt was one area that resulted in the biggest shift in perspectives. Throughout life, not every prayer seems to be answered, and not every sick person is healed immediately. This can lead a person a person to doubting that God will truly comply with a request for wisdom. Through the interviews, however, the opposite perspective came to light. Despite the five very different people interviewed, every single one of them said that any aspect of doubt they had was not in God, but in their own self. One interviewee said that they did not doubt God, but they doubted their ability to receive what He gave. This consensus, that there was no doubt that God would follow through, was an incredible thing to hear, because it was said by people in every stage of life. People with their whole lives ahead of them did not doubt that God wanted to help them. People who had experienced most of their lives, and those who were only just beginning, already knew God wanted to help them. Any doubt was due to their own human limitations. Despite the interviews, this different interpretation of 'doubt' is not necessarily the implied meaning in James 1:6. When studying the word choice and meaning of the Greek word used, James appears to be highlighting how "this faith is an exercising of trust in the generosity and power of God" (Richardson, 1997, p. 66). James is calling believers to have faith in the Lord and not doubt His capabilities or generosity. Rather than delving further into the direct meaning of the verse, the current intended focus remains on each individual's personal application as seen in their own lives. While perhaps not James' intended meaning, this reveals a different perspective on the role of doubt in a believer's walk with Christ.

These interviews were intended to focus on the process of asking for and receiving wisdom, and thus had no questions regarding God's nature of generosity and willingness. The people interviewed were never asked about their perspective on God's providence. Despite this, every person interviewed brought up God's desire to provide for His people. They all knew God to be an eager giver; they all knew Him as Jehovah Jireh. The knowledge that God wants to give to His children backed up their opinions that their doubt was in themselves and not in God. Through each situation described in the interviews, God's desire to provide shone through to reveal an ending that was always better than the one

expected. Some people discussed a change in the direction their life was going, one where their plan was eliminated so God's could take control. Another interviewee mentioned how God provided knowledge and direction when they had exhausted their own resources and was near giving up. No matter the form the wisdom took, God's providence was always one prayer away, ready to be theirs if they only asked.

A final similarity found that was shared among all five interviewees was their perspective on wisdom. Wisdom, in their minds, was not the general ability to apply knowledge, as it is often understood by the world. Rather, it was specific direction and guidance regarding a situation they were immediately facing. These people did not desire the wisdom to rule a nation, or general, overarching wisdom; it was the wisdom in regard to marriage and raising children, guidance to the next step in life, or direction in teaching biblically sound curriculum to their children. Their requests were simple, humble admissions that wisdom is needed in every step in life. Their requests were simple prayers to a God who provides direction to the directionally challenged.

Jehovah Jireh in Action

Each person brought stories of their personal encounters with Jehovah Jireh to the interview. One man discussed how God brought past experiences to mind to help bring direction and peace to current situations. Whether it was marriage and parenting direction needed, counseling situations, or illness scares, God was always there to give peace, comfort, and guidance. Another interviewee discussed the relationship between closeness with God and receiving direction and wisdom. When one does not prioritize growth in Christ, the distance between God and self makes it easy to miss the gifts God offers. One woman talked of a time when surrendering her circumstance to God resulted in a flood of assistance and comprehension regarding her situation. Before bringing it to God, there had been a total lack of knowledge and a dead end was imminent. After exhausting her resources, God demonstrated how His resources do not deplete and are available to those who ask. Another interviewee discussed how God is willing and eager to give, but in order to receive His help, one must be listening and looking for it. They discussed how doubt in one's limitations should not become a barrier keeping one from looking for and receiving what God wants to give. A last interviewee talked about how God does not play games, and how confusion, indecision, and a lack of peace are not qualities God wishes for His people. God is a loving father who desires to provide for His children's needs. Jehovah Jireh is present and active today, demonstrating that God's providence did not end when the last book of the Bible was written.

Conclusion

Jehovah Jireh's unwavering consistency is maintained through the ages as seen in Psalm's shepherd, James' gift-giver, and today's prayer answerer. Psalm 23 discusses how the Lord provides through the depiction of a shepherd caring for his flock. Just as a shepherd provides everything for his sheep, the Lord cares for His people in every possible way. James shows his readers how God provides abundantly for those who ask, connecting the Old Testament's picture of a good shepherd to the New Testament's illustration of a generous father. God's unchanging character is what makes Jehovah Jireh truly our provider, for time tests character in a way nothing else can. Original research supports the conclusion that God's providence continues to pour forth into the lives of Christians in the twenty first century. It is seen through the shared perspective that God is a generous giver who wants to give good gifts, as well as the many stories supporting how abundantly God gives direction and guidance when asked. The interviews bring to light the concern that doubt in one's own limitations is present in every generation, but the same people discussed how their limitations did not limit God. The combination

Unkauf, Jehovah Jireh

of scriptural and personal evidence proves that God alone is the true provider of any and all needs, done out of the love and care of a father, and dealt out with the authority of an almighty God.

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