



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

**A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)**  
**Lesson 5.13 – The Doctrine of Providence or Preservation**

**God's Hand in the Length of Our Lives**

In His providence God has determined the length of life of each individual in the world. Our length of life in this world is our time of grace, that is, a time during which we may hear the Gospel of Christ, believe in Him, and gain eternal life. In a general way God regulates the lives of all peoples on earth. He determines where they will live and all the circumstances of their lives. Paul told the Athenians: **"He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him"** (Acts 17:26-27).

Average length of life has varied at different times and in different places. But basically, what Moses wrote in Psalm 90 is still true: **"The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away"** (Psalm 90:10). In comparison with the eternal God, our time on earth is as nothing. **"Lord, make me to know my end, and what is the measure of my days, that I may know how frail I am. Indeed, You have made my days as handbreadths, and my age is as nothing before You; certainly every man at his best state is but vapor"** (Psalm 39:4-5).

Job knew that God had determined exactly how long he would live. He said: **"Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble. He comes forth like a flower and fades away; he flees like a shadow and does not continue... Since his days are determined, the number of his months is with You; You have appointed his limits, so that he cannot pass"** (Job 14:1-5). Because God has determined the length of our lives, we join David in saying: **"As for me, I trust in You, O LORD; I say, 'You are my God.' My times are in Your hand"** (Psalm 31:14-15).

God does not normally preserve our lives through miracles, but rather by natural means. He gives us a longer life by letting us make healthful choices and by keeping us away from that which would shorten our lives. God promises a long life in connection with the fourth commandment, but sometimes He does the opposite and takes a young person to Himself. God may do this so that the believer does not have to face God's earthly judgments on human sins. For example, God's prophet Ahijah told King Jeroboam and his wife that their child would die. And then Ahijah said: **"All Israel shall mourn for him and bury him, for he is the only one of Jeroboam who shall come to the grave, because in him there is found something good toward the LORD God of Israel in the house of Jeroboam"** (1 Kings 14:13).

When the apostle Paul and the 276 who were traveling with him were shipwrecked after a terrible storm at sea, God told Paul: **"Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you"** (Acts 27:24). Paul had this assurance from God; yet when the sailors tried to escape, Paul saw what they were doing, and he warned the centurion in time to prevent their escape. A little later, the soldiers wanted to kill the prisoners, including Paul, but the centurion would not permit them to do so. In other words, it was through the actions of Paul and the centurion that God kept His promise so that **"they all escaped safely to land"** (Acts 27:44).

We see God's hand in the life of King Hezekiah. God sent His prophet Isaiah to King Hezekiah with this message: **"Thus says the LORD: 'Set your house in order, for you shall die, and not live'"** (2 Kings

20:1). But after Hezekiah prayed to the Lord for an extension of his life, God sent Isaiah back to him again with this message: **“I will add to your days fifteen years”** (2 Kings 20:6). **“Then Isaiah said, ‘Take a lump of figs.’ So they took and laid it on the boil, and he recovered”** (2 Kings 20:7).

Just as we do not know the day of the world’s end, neither do we know the day of our own end. We should be always ready. Jesus told a parable of a foolish man who built some barns. This man was not ready for his own death: **“Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: ‘The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, “What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?” So he said, “I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.’” But God said to him, “Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?” So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God”** (Luke 12:16-21).

### Questions

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1. What is meant by a time of grace?
2. How long did Moses say a man’s life generally lasted? (Note: Moses lived to be 120)
3. Which passages state that God determines the length of a person’s life?
4. How does God usually keep people alive?
5. Why does God sometimes take His children to Himself when they are young?
6. How did God preserve the lives of the 276 passengers on Paul’s ship?
7. What led God to extend King Hezekiah’s life?
8. Why was the barn builder in Jesus’ parable a fool?