

Dramatic Providence

I Miracle or Providence?

A. What is a miracle?

1. Healing a man born blind is a miracle (Jesus in John 9:2 ff).
2. Healing a man born with deformed legs and feet is a miracle (Peter in Acts 3:2-10)
3. Making a dead man live is a miracle (Jesus w/ Lazarus in John 11:43 and Paul w/ Eutychus in Acts 20:9-12.
4. A miracle is God working in creation and changing the natural order.
5. Robert South: *“A work exceeding the power of any created agent, consequently being an effect of the divine omnipotence.”*

B. What is providence

1. When a car runs a red light and misses you by inches – that is providence.
2. When heavy traffic makes you miss your airline flight and that flight crashes – that is providence.
3. When God supplies light bulbs for the church – that is providence.
4. Knut Hamsum: *“When good befalls a man he calls it Providence, when evil, Fate.”*
5. Providence is God’s control of circumstances to effect His will.

C. Romans 8:28: **“God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”**

II The evidence of dramatic providence in the life of Paul.

A. The evidence of dramatic providence in Paul’s defense before the Jews.

1. He was **“...a Hebrew of Hebrews, as to the Law, a Pharisee...”** (Phil. 3:5).
2. He was **“...a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in ...”** Jerusalem (verse 22:3).
3. He was **“...educated under Gamaliel...”**
4. He was **“...zealous for God...”**
5. He was made a Christian by God.
 - a) He relates his conversion in verses 6-13.
 - b) He was called as a prophet of God in verse 15.
 - c) He was given a direct commission from God in verse 21.
 - d) He was blessed with a vision of the risen Christ.
 - 1) Acts 9 at his conversion.
 - 2) Verse 17-19.
6. The reason for the reaction of the Jews, verse 22-23.
 - a) The Jews were not against making converts
 - 1) They were zealous to do so.
 - 2) Matt. 23:15 Jesus says, **“Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel about on sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.”**
 - b) Adam Clarke.
 - 1) They understood Paul was saying that God had rejected them as His particular people and called the Gentiles in their place. Adam Clarke
 - 2) They believed Paul was enticing others to strange worship and was deserving of death (Dt. 13:15)
 - 3) They were **“...tossing dust into the air...”**
 - (a) They were frustrated and angry because Paul was protected by the Romans and they could not kill him.
 - (b) As Shimei was frustrated and angry with King David in 2 Sam. 16:13.

- 4) Clarke quotes M. Denon (Travels in Egypt, vol. 3, p. 98), who on coming down the Nile to Cairo, stopped at the ancient city of Antinoe, to examine its ruins.
“Being desirous of obtaining a view of the whole of these ruins, we ascended a little hill, and soon perceived the inhabitants of the modern village assembling behind an appropriate eminence: scarcely had we come over against them than, supposing our intentions to be hostile, they called out for assistance, and threw dust into the air, in token of defiance. The alarm spread, and they began firing upon us.”

B. The evidence for dramatic providence in Paul’s arrest.

1. Roman garrison was in Jerusalem to keep the peace because the Jews were so hostile.
2. He had been arrested because the Jews were trying to kill him and the whole of Jerusalem was in confusion (Acts 21:31).
3. The Roman commander intended to examine Paul by scourging (verse 24).
4. He ordered Paul to be brought into the barracks **Show picture of Fortress of Antonia**
5. His defense before the Romans.
 - a) Providentially, Paul was a Roman citizen.
 - b) He was protected from punishment before trial by Roman law.
 - 1) Valerian laws forbid any citizen to be bound.
 - 2) Porcian laws forbid any citizen to be beaten with rods.
 - 3) “It is a transgression of the law to bind a Roman citizen: it is wickedness to scourge him.”
 - 4) Cicero: *“Many who are accused of evil may be absolved, when the cause is heard; but unheard, no man can be condemned.”*

C. The evidence for dramatic providence in Paul’s trial before the Sanhedrin.

1. Seventy elders of Israel led by the High Priest.
 - a) Seventy were from all the tribes of Israel and were appointed by the people.
 - b) Numbers 11:16: Seventy elders were appointed to help the High Priest (Moses) rule the people.
2. High Priest was no longer hereditary from the line of Levi.
 - a) Romans appointed the High Priest.
 - b) Office was also available to the highest bidder.
 - c) Romans were in control of the Sanhedrin and High Priest.
Verse 30: The commander “...**ordered the chief priests and all the Council to assemble...**”
3. The Sanhedrin was made up of Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes.
 - a) Pharisees believed in a future resurrection, spirits, and angels, and believed that keeping the Law would bring future reward.
 - b) Sadducees denied the resurrection, angels, or spirits. They believed there was only matter and the soul died with the body. (Josephus, Antiquities, book 18, chap. 1, sec. 4).
4. The status of the High Priest.
 - a) **Acts 23:1-5.**
 - b) Paul must have known who the High Priest was.
 - 1) He had been in Jerusalem at least a week (Acts 21:27).
 - 2) As a Pharisee, he would be knowledgeable.
 - 3) The situation of Ananias.
 - (a) He had been taken to Rome before Claudius (Josephus).
 - (b) He had been returned to Jerusalem, but not to the priesthood.
 - (c) He may have been presiding as a courtesy and Paul knew the office was vacant.
5. Paul uses the division in the Council in his defense.
 - a) He sets the Pharisees beliefs against the Sadducees beliefs.

- b) Providentially, the Roman commander and his troops were present.
 - 1) Probably to protect Paul as a Roman citizen.
 - 2) They protected Paul from almost certain death.
- 6. God encourages Paul and gives him a further commission.
 - a) Verse 11: Take courage...
 - 1) Paul surely would have been discouraged.
 - 2) It appeared his career as a preacher and evangelist was over.
 - b) He is given his real desire.
 - 1) "...as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also."
 - 2) Paul had long to visit Rome and encourage the Christians there, but had so far been prevented (Romans 1).

III God's dramatic providence in our lives.

A. My testimony.

B. Each of you can see in your life how God arranged the circumstances to bring you to Himself at the right time.

C. Dramatic providence in the life and death of Jesus Christ.

- 1. Pax Romana
- 2. One language spoken throughout the world.
- 3. Providentially, the Gospel could spread very rapidly.
- 4. Rom 5:6-7 For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.
- 5. Rom 5:8: But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

And THAT is not only dramatic providence, it is truly miraculous.