

A Study in Providence
Acts 22
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From Acts 22, A STUDY IN PROVIDENCE

#1. PROVIDENCE: THE PERFECT PERSPECTIVE v.1-10.

This function of God, understood as providence, is *a complete and perfect perspective*. The Lord knew that Saul of Tarsus was an active, violent opponent of Christ, the gospel and His church (v.4, 5.) But the Lord sees beyond the moment. He comprehends past--present--future as one piece.

And God sees the human heart and mind. His supernatural knowledge presages how any man, of whatever bearing will respond to revealed truth (v.6-8.) "And I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Get up and go on into Damascus, and there you will be told of all that has been appointed for to do'" (v.10.)

Paul will learn that *providence can be a hard taskmaster*. The providence of God, now materialized, takes in all things and leaves nothing out. It overtakes one's life, history, experience and one's thinking. The providence of God, applied, means that experience becomes part of a larger supernatural reality. It falls in on our awareness suddenly and without explanation (v. 6, 7.)

Providence is beyond the self, and Saul relinquished himself to it. This perfect perspective and the power behind it *intrudes into one's life; providence does not ask us*. As a consequence of the syntax, the structure of personal life changes.

Providence is *an imperious force* in human history. Saul of Tarsus did not have the perfect perspective; he had to believe in it and trust it. This force involves a plan not derived by human mind, will nor human preference.

As providence falls upon us, we remember, with confidence, that it represents the perfect perspective.

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#2. PROVIDENCE: THE REDUCTION OF ALL IRRELEVANCE (vv. 11-13.)

Saul of Tarsus, killer of Christians (v.4), persecutor of believers in Christ (v.5), was "led by the hand" (v.11) "into Damascus". This influential man was reduced to impotence. Saul learns that he had been wrong about everything. His belief structure was collapsing, being dismantled.

When providence makes itself known, it moves long held ideas off of their foundation. Saul had lost control of events and he knew it. Providence was the engine driving circumstances, events and states of being. How does such a man comprehend what was happening?

Another man was *enfolded into the providential stream*. "Ananias", "devout", "by the standard of the law", "well spoken of" (v.12) presented himself to this man in Damascus. A flow of unseen but very felt power was carrying them all along -- all of them, Saul, Ananias and the believers. The force of providence was taking them all beyond their design and will, to a set of experiences they had not pursued.

For Saul personally, this was *a great reversal*. Providence will have its way; all obstacles to it will be swept away. One does not have to like it.

The rule is: *Providence dispenses with that which is irrelevant to it*. Providence will add some things to our lives that are relevant to it, and it will take some things away from us that are not.

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#3. PROVIDENCE: ANOTHER UNIVERSE OF MEANING (v.14-16.)

Ananias spoke to Saul: "The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will and to see the Righteous One and to hear an utterance from His mouth" (v.14.) The Almighty had "appointed" a man, an enemy, in material circumstance "to know", "to see", "to hear" things that make for an extraordinarily different universe of meaning.

Regardless of what human wisdom reports, this is an *exalted position* to hold. And such providence brings with it a strong dose of responsibility; a supremely spiritual responsibility: "For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard" (v.15.)

Saul will report and represent to all men precisely, the revealed truth. Saul's mind, heart, soul, language and body will be put to the test by the Lord in all of this. And he will bear up; his shoulder against the task.

All this was put before a man, yet unwashed from his grievous sins toward Heaven (v.16.) But the Almighty had declared that a condition of peace would be fixed between Saul of Tarsus and the God of his fathers.

That is how a "Saul" becomes a "Paul". This imperfect human instrument is about to become a threshold to *another universe of meaning* for a great multitude. If they will receive it.

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#4. PROVIDENCE: DEEP VIGILANCE (v.17-21.)

Providence maintains *a deep vigilance* over the developing circumstances of those who are called to it. Paul was in danger as a direct result of the call of the Lord (v.17, 18.) Deep vigilance makes arrangements and provisions for its subjects (v.18.) Providence is prepared to deal with immediate threats, and with those still remote in time.

The apostle thought that the Jews would understand his motive because of his history of opposition to Christ and the gospel (v.19, 20.) He was wrong. Paul's teaching had challenged the then-prevailing language manifold. And that was a capital offense: "because they will not accept your testimony about Me" (v.18.)

The Gospel pushed an unrecognized and controversial language manifold into public notice. There are always social consequences for that. Believers do not know the future ahead of them but deep vigilance does. Those who function in the wake of providence are always in over their heads. Deep vigilance looks after them.

This text and many others illustrate a particular dynamic. *The believer's concern for the future is displaced and supplanted by confidence in deep vigilance.* Trusting in providence carries one beyond the range of rational enterprise. There can be a kind of human discomfort associated with that.

Then the Lord asserted Himself: "Go! For I will send you far away to the Gentiles" (v.21.) Deep vigilance removed Paul from one situation and formulated another. Providence is beyond human circumstance. Always beyond.

This means that believers face an ever-present obligation. We respond to providence and we do not simply react to circumstance and its conditions.

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#5. PROVIDENCE: DEEP POWER (v. 22-30.)

Providence executes *deep power* on behalf of those who are prepared to live by it. Such power might be subtle in its effect or it might arrive with great force. In any event, Scripture assures the reader that the deep power is always more than sufficient to every circumstance.

The enemies of providence were in accord: "Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he should not be allowed to live" (v.22.) Paul was arrested (v. 24.) And this servant of providence was in danger of being tortured, beaten (v.24.)

But that was not to be. Deep power is there to ensure that the mission will be unimpeded. *The entire understanding of "impediments"* changes under the dominion of deep power. We must

learn that what appears rationally to be an impediment can, in fact, be an instrument of perfection.

Believers come to expect this dynamic. Consequently, our personal experience is subject to the external law of deep power. If this be so, then it follows that fear, discouragement and even depression must yield to trust in *deep providence*. Acts 22 is proof that no experience of ours is independent of the supernatural energy, which is providence and its deep effects upon time.

The world is not our friend. Experience is to be carried by the believer with the composure endorsed by the providence of the Lord.