



THE HAND OF GOD IN HISTORY

Is God alive? Does He care? Is He even aware of what is going on on this earth? Does He ever interfere?

The providence of God is often seen in Scriptures. The Scriptures bear out the fact that God moves quietly behind the scene, to accomplish His Will and Purpose. It is not by accident Joseph saw that though his brothers had meant to do him evil, God had meant it for their good, to save the family alive. **Genesis 50:20**

Mordecai, overhearing the plot to kill the king, so that he would be elevated in the king's eyes, was not a coincident. **Esther 2:22**

Nehemiah's being a cupbearer before a mighty monarch, who would grant the Jews the right to return to Jerusalem, was the hand of God in history. **Nehemiah 2**

Mordecai saw that Esther was born to the kingdom for such a time as she lived. **Esther 4:14**

Daniel recognized that it was God who removed kings and set them up. **Daniel 2:21**

Job recognized that God is a manipulator of kings, judges, and princes on the earth. **Job 12:12-23**

David said, "For promotion cometh neither from the east or from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge: He putteth down one, and setteth up another." **Psalms 75:6-7**

Jeremiah was told to tell mankind that God made the earth and gave power to whom He pleased, just as He had to Nebuchadnezzar. **Jeremiah 27:5-6**

Nebuchadnezzar found out, after eating grass as an ox for seven years, that "the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomever He will." **Daniel 4:17; 5:21**

But do we recognize the extent in which God intervenes in the events of history? In this article, I would like to just briefly show you the wisdom of God in preparing for the evangelization of the world in the first century. Here are a few things that I have observed, that God has done to prepare the way for the evangelization of the whole world:

FIRST - Alexander the Great had successfully mingled western and eastern civilizations by his conquering of the whole known world. (Incidentally, the missionary journeys of Paul are strikingly close to Alexander's route of conquest.)

SECOND - The Greek language gradually prevailed over the world, and men of all nations developed a great interest in the literature of the other nations. This universal language made communication much easier for Christians to share their faith in later years, when they were forced to flee from Saul of Tarsus.

THIRD - Palestine became a communication center from Syria, Egypt, Asia, and Africa. She became the middle of their routes. The history of Israel became widely known throughout the world by this means.

FOURTH - The Old Testament was translated into Greek because of the order of Ptolemy Philadelphus and deposited in the library of Alexandria. This Septuagint translation became popular throughout the whole world. This caused all nations to know of a Promised Messiah. He became the desire of the nations. The wise men knew of His Star, and Herod's magicians knew where the Messiah was expected to be born.

FIFTH - There was a great dispersion of Jews around the world. This called attention to monotheism, and the expectation of a coming Messiah. Over 100,000 Jews were transferred at one time throughout the world.

SIXTH - The Jewish synagogues were established as teaching points around the world. In fact, there were 460 just in Jerusalem. Over 150 remains are said to have been found in other places. These assemblies taught the Law of Moses daily. Visiting Jews were asked to address the members. These became preaching points all over the known world for men such as Paul and Barnabas. This was usually the first place they went to preach in each city to which they came.

SEVENTH - The Jews themselves, in the dispersion had begun to proselyte the Greeks. They won many from polytheism. As a result, their proselytes were set up for conversion to Christianity, when the message came to them. They often accepted the Gospel before the Jews did. This fact played a large part in the growth of early Christianity among the Gentiles who had been proselyted to Judaism.

EIGHTH - Polytheism was falling into disfavor among the Greeks. Plato, the Cynics, the Stoics, and the Epicureans were looking twice at their own beliefs. Athens even had a statue to the unknown god (Theos), while they worshipped the gods (daimon or demons), whom they thought were the spirits of dead men. Paul was able to declare that they were too religious, and told them of the one true God.

NINTH - When Rome took over the world, there was a One-World Government. Freedom to travel abroad was enhanced. Toleration of different religions was not only the norm, but enforced. This allowed Christianity to flourish in a few years. The Jews were the Christians' first foe, not the Gentiles. Only when Judaism forced its hand did the Romans' cowardly politicians begin to persecute the Church. It was strictly the politician pressure exercised by the Jews that caused Rome to turn its arm against Christianity. When Christianity was first started, there was a great freedom of evangelism around the Roman world.

TENTH - A system of roads unparalleled to that time had been devised; this made travel easier. The world, being a



One-World Government, allowed shipping lines to be freely used by Roman citizens, such as Paul. Roman citizens also had rights that others did not have. Paul, as a Roman citizen, was used of God to propagate the Gospel message around the world. I am confident that his ability to appeal to Caesar, because of his citizenship, no doubt helped him more times than are recorded in Scriptures. Other converts of Roman citizenship would likewise benefit from this arrangement.

ELEVENTH - The gift of tongues, given to many of the Gospel in the first century, as the Word of the Lord went out of Jerusalem.

TWELFTH - The persecution of the Church, rather than being a hindrance, dispersed believers around the world with the Good News of Salvation. The Church was no longer a Jewish sect. The Samaritans believed and obeyed (Acts 8). Jewish proselytes were converted (Acts 8). The God-fearing Gentiles, such as Cornelius, began to be harvested (Acts 10). The barbarians, who

never knew the Word of God, were baptized (Acts 16). The disciples of John, who had been dispersed, were located and taught about John's King (Acts 19).

THIRTEENTH - The miracles that were done by the apostles and those upon whom they had bestowed the gifts, caused both Jews and Greeks, as well as barbarians, to draw nigh to listen. These miracles established the authority of the apostles and their message, and then served as credentials until God's Word was established!

Once the Word was completed and the miracles ceased, the authority lay in what the apostles had written. Just as the 400 silent years of revelation from Malachi to Christ sent the Jews to the Scriptures, so the Church in the absence of the apostles was sent out the Word for authority. They, therefore, preached the Written Word, and the faith grew wherever it was preached. When Rome took away the Word, there was apostasy. The Reformation and Restoration again gave out the Word, and the Church grew and prospered once more. Here also, God's providence was at work.

One can clearly see from these thirteen advantages that God had been moving to cause the world to receive the Gospel. When one adds to these thoughts the fact that the Jews had been prepared as a people to expect the Messiah, and to present the doctrine of monotheism to the world, we are made aware of the wisdom of God. Revelation had ceased since Malachi.

This sent the Jews to the Scriptures with more diligence. Their subjection to Rome intensified their desire for the Redeemer "like unto Moses:" to come. They no doubt became familiar with the Scriptural prophecies and those passages that spoke of Him were especially dear to their hearts.

When John the Immerser came, saying, "The time is fulfilled, the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand" their hearts must have throbbled with emotion and anticipation. Unfortunately, the Jews expected an earthly king to put down their Roman enemies. They rejected the King. Nevertheless, He whose Kingdom was not of this world, was believed on by 3,000 souls on Pentecost. Soon 5,000 more were added. Later, a great company of the priests believed! When persecution finally came, they fled and preached the Word everywhere. Finally, the apostle to the Gentiles, Saul of Tarsus, was converted.

It was about this time that they were called Christians and they began to use the universal language of Greek as they fled from country to country. They traveled those well-paved roads and took advantage of the One-World Government God had permitted.

They sailed on those open ships. They used the Septuagint version of the Old Testament, which God led Ptolemy to desire. They began to preach unto men "Jesus".

They arrived in town and went directly to the Jewish synagogues to declare that Jesus was indeed “the Christ.” The dissatisfied idolaters listened and turned to the Living God. In one generation we are told that the truth of the Gospel had gone into all the world (**Colossians 1:6**). Paul could tell the Colossians that “every creature under Heaven had heard the Gospel” (**Colossians 1:23**).

Justin Martyr, one of the early apologists of Christianity, was able to say: “*There exists not a single race of men, barbarians, Greeks, or by whatever name they may be called, warlike, or Nomadic, whether they live in tents or wander in wagons, among whom prayers and thanksgiving are not offered in the Name of Jesus, the Crucified, to the Father and Creator of all things.*”

Tertullian said to a Roman Emperor: “*We Christians are but of yesterday, and we have filled your cities, your islands, your fortresses, your marketplaces, the very camp, palace, senate, forum, and left you nothing but the temples of your gods....If we were to make a general secession, and betake ourselves to some remote corner of the world, you would be horror struck at the solitude.*”

Yes, God’s providence had directed a great onslaught against the kingdom of Satan. The early Church moved victoriously. They didn’t pray for deliverance from persecution, they prayed for boldness to witness. God answered that prayer.

Is there a lesson in this for us? There surely is! We need not worry about the events of today, nor of tomorrow. God is alive and well. He will move in His own time as He sees fit. Humanism, Communism, Catholicism, Cultism, and Spiritualism will not triumph over the Church.

Nothing shall prevail against the Church! God is working! God may be preparing the circumstances for a great ingathering of souls. The blood of the martyrs is said to be the seed of the Church. Persecution will only ignite the fires of devotion. Remember that men can do nothing permanent against the Truth, for the God Omnipotent reigneth. He holds the future. His providence may not be seen as yet, but someday we will see its fruits. Herein is the encouragement for us:

“He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity: he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.”

--Revelation 13:10

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