

Abounding Grace Christian Church

The Acts of the Holy Spirit through the Church – Part 73

I. Exposition of Chapter Twenty Six.

A. **Verse 1 - Agrippa gives Paul permission to Speak.** It's worth remembering that this King Agrippa was the great grandson of Herod the Great who had tried to destroy Jesus as a child. His great uncle, Antipas had John the Baptist beheaded and his father Agrippa I, had James, the son of Zebedee and brother to John executed. So, Paul had no reason to think that this man was going to show him any favor.

B. Verses 2-3 – Paul's opening Words.

1. **Verse 2 – "...today I shall answer for myself before you concerning all the things of which I am accused by the Jews."** – The word "answer" (Gr. *apologeomai*) means; "to speak on behalf of oneself or of others against accusations presumed to be false—'to defend oneself'"¹

2. **Verse 3 – "...especially because you are expert in all customs and questions which have to do with the Jews..."** – Regarding this account, Dr. Stanley Horton writes:

"This is Paul's final hearing in Acts, and the third account of his conversion, giving new details. With Agrippa's permission to speak for himself, Paul 'motioned with his hand' (Gk. *ekteinas tēn cheira*, 'stretched out his hand,' in the manner of a Roman orator) and proceeded to make his defense. He counted himself fortunate to appear before Agrippa because he was "well acquainted with all the Jewish customs and controversies." (Being a Jew by religion, Agrippa could be expected to have a concern about these things.) Therefore Paul begged him to 'listen ... patiently.'"²

C. Verses 4-11 – Paul's Life before receiving Christ.

1. **Verses 4-5 – "...all the Jews know...They knew me from the first, if they were willing to testify..."** – Paul was well known in Jerusalem, not only by the people but also amongst the religious leaders. They also knew that he was taught "...according to the strictest sect of our religion..." and that he "...lived as a Pharisee." – Grant Osborne writes:

"He had not been merely a Pharisee but a member of 'the strictest sect' among them...Even his enemies could 'testify, if they are willing' to this fact. 'Known me for a long time' refers to the fact that he had been trained under Rabbi Gamaliel, the grandson of Hillel and the leading Pharisee of his day. Before his Damascus road conversion, Paul was a very well-known Pharisaic leader and likely personally knew every member of the Sanhedrin. They could all testify to how devout he had been as a Jew."³

2. **Verses 6-8** – Paul is saying that what he was believing and proclaiming now was consistent with his Jewish heritage and Old Testament promises. The word "hope" is used three times in this passage and means; "to look forward with confidence to that which is good and beneficial"⁴ Dr. Bob Utley writes:

"the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers' This refers to the OT prophecy of (1) the coming of the Messiah or (2) the resurrection of the dead (cf. 23:6; 24:15; Job 14:14–15; 19:25–27; Dan. 12:2). Paul saw 'the Way' as the fulfillment of the OT (cf. Matt. 5:17–19; Gal. 3)"⁵

Dr. Thomas Constable adds: "Paul said that it was because of his Jewish heritage, not in spite of it, that he believed and preached what he did. The Jewish 'hope' finds fulfillment in the Christian gospel. It was, therefore, ironic that the Jews, of all people, should have charged him with disloyalty."⁶

"And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world. But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died. So you see, just as death came into the world through a man, now the resurrection from the dead has begun through another Man."

¹Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 437.

²Stanley M. Horton, *Acts: A Logion Press Commentary* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2001), 385.

³Grant R. Osborne, *Acts: Verse by Verse*, Osborne New Testament Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 444.

⁴Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 295.

⁵Robert James Utley, *Luke the Historian: The Book of Acts*, vol. Volume 3B, Study Guide Commentary Series (Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International, 2003), 270.

⁶Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Acts* (<http://www.soniclight.com>: Sonic Light Publication, 2019), 463.

3. Verses 9-11 – Paul’s zeal in Persecuting Christians.

- a. Verse 9 – Paul now begins to explain that not only had he been a strict Jewish Pharisee, but he was also an enemy of Christians. The Amplified Bible translates this verse:

“I myself indeed was [once] persuaded that it was my duty to do many things contrary to and in defiance of the name of Jesus of Nazareth.” – Acts 26:9 – Amplified Bible.

- b. Verse 10 – **“And that is what I did in Jerusalem; I [not only] locked up many of the [faithful] saints (holy ones) in prison by virtue of authority received from the chief priests, but when they were being condemned to death, I cast my vote against them.” – Amplified Bible**

1) It seems noteworthy that Paul refers to the Christians as **“saints”** here in the presence of Agrippa. As the Amplified points out, the word, **“saints”** means; **“holy ones”**. Also has the idea of those who have a **“special relationship with God”** and refers to those who are **“God’s people.”**⁷

2) **“I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them.”** Utley has some interesting comments:

“having received authority” Paul was the ‘official’ persecutor for the Sanhedrin.

“when they were being put to death” This shows the intensity of the persecution. The ‘Way’ was not a minor issue; it was a life-and-death issue and it still is!

‘cast my vote against them’ This is the technical word in Greek for an official vote either in the Sanhedrin or a local synagogue. But because no local synagogue could/would vote on death issues, it was probably the Sanhedrin. If it was in the Sanhedrin, then Paul had to have been married.⁸

- c. Verse 11 – **“And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities.”** Paul states here that this was done by him “often”. There should be no doubt that he was doing great damage to the cause of Christ. Grant Osborne gives us insight:

“Paul’s goal (26:11) was to use punishment as a goad to force Christians to “blaspheme” Christ by renouncing their faith rather than blaspheming the Jewish God and the Torah. The punishment was likely the “forty lashes minus one” (2 Cor 11:24), which synagogues often used against lawbreakers. He went from synagogue to synagogue in Jerusalem and the surrounding area ferreting out the Jewish Christians and bringing them up on charges, then having them beaten to force them to reject their Christian beliefs.”⁹

- d. Dr. Horton gives a great summary of this:

“Paul, like so many of the great witnesses to Christ, openly confessed what Christ had saved him from. He had thought it necessary to do ‘all that was possible’ against Jesus of Nazareth (His character, nature, and authority); he had ‘put many of the saints [the believers set apart for God] in prison.’ When they were put to death, he had ‘cast [his] vote against them.’ Going from synagogue to synagogue, he had often punished the believers, trying to compel them to ‘blaspheme’ (that is, ‘to call Jesus accursed’). The Greek implies (as the NIV brings out), however, that he was not successful. Nevertheless, by his violent persecution of believers he was trying to destroy the Church (Gal. 1:13). So exceedingly and madly enraged had he been against them that he had pursued them “even ... to foreign cities.” (In 1 Tim. 1:13, Paul points out that he had acted in ignorance of the truth.)”¹⁰

D. Verses 12-18 – Paul tells of his Encounter with Jesus Christ!

1. The original account of this is found in 9:1-9. This is the third time Paul experience in recorded in Acts, the second time is found in 22:3-21. This account was around 28 years after the event.
2. There are a few additional details given here.
 - a. Verse 14 – **“...It is hard for you to kick against the goads.”** – Bob Utley asserts

⁷Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 124.

⁸Robert James Utley, *Luke the Historian: The Book of Acts*, vol. Volume 3B, Study Guide Commentary Series, 271.

⁹Grant R. Osborne, *Acts: Verse by Verse*, Osborne New Testament Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 446–447.

¹⁰Horton, 386-387.

“This phrase is unique to this context, possibly because it was a Greek/Latin proverb, not Jewish. Paul always knew to what audience he was speaking and how to communicate to them! This is referring to (1) a pointed stick used by those who directed oxen to pull carts and plows or (2) projections on the front of the cart or wagon to keep the animals from kicking backward. This proverb was used to denote the human futility of resisting divine initiatives.¹¹

¹¹Utley,272.