

Thoughts on Acts Twenty-Six

Paul presented his case before the mob in Jerusalem, Felix and the Jerusalem Jews in Caesarea, then Festus and a new group of Jews from Jerusalem. Finally, he is given an open hearing before King Herod Agrippa 2. In this hearing, Paul, guided by the Holy Spirit, spoke to the heart of the king and governor, presenting a lesson on the gospel they needed to hear and obey. There were four points to Paul's address, his gratitude to Agrippa, his early life, his vision of Christ, and his work among the Jews and Gentiles. The latter point resulted in the attack on him in Jerusalem. The reaction from those who heard Paul parallels that of many who hear the gospel today. There was unbelief from Festus and belief but not obedience from Agrippa.

Critiques of the Bible are quick to point out the differences in the three accounts of Paul's encounter with the risen Christ. In the first (Acts 9:4), Jesus is quoted as saying, "**Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?**" The second account was in Jerusalem, as Paul was protected from the mob trying to kill him. Paul quotes Jesus as saying, "**Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?**" "And I answered, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said to me, '**I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting**'" (Acts 22:7-8). The final account, given to Festus and Agrippa (Acts 26:14), quotes Jesus as saying, "**why are you persecuting Me?** but then adds, "**It is hard for you to kick against the goads.**" There are other differences, but these draw the most comments.

Notice that all three passages contain the quote, "why are you persecuting Me?" The difference that some take issue with is Jesus' statement about kicking the goads. But this addition is in perfect accord with scriptural language rules. We noted differences between Old Testament prophets and New Testament quotes, noting that the Holy Spirit is quoting Himself to allow the reader or hearer to understand the meaning in their language and dialect. Jesus presented lessons in Galilee and Judea with slightly different words and in a different sequence to accommodate the people of the two regions. Paul quotes other parts of his encounter with Christ for the same reason. The Jewish mob, some of those same Jews with Felix, and later, Festus and Agrippa, make for three very different audiences.

The first group needed assurance that Paul was still a member of the Jewish nation. The second explains events for the Roman authorities, and the third is a gospel sermon for unbelievers. The Holy Spirit led Paul to speak to each group with the words they needed to hear. Jesus had said, "*Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves. But beware of men, for they will hand you over to the courts and scourge you in their synagogues; and you will even be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. But when they hand you over, do not worry about how or what you are to say; for it will be given you in that hour what you are to say. For it is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you*" (Matthew 10:16-20). And just before going to the cross, Jesus said, "*These things I have spoken to you while abiding with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you*" (John 14:25-26).

The conclusion of this speech contains three points worthy of further investigation. The first is in verse 22, "So, having obtained help from God" A. T. Robertson says that help is an "Old word from *epikoureo*, to aid, and that from *epikouros*, ally, assister. Only here in N.T. God is Paul's ally" (RWP). Paul is saying that he is not only an apostle of Christ, sent out to preach, but that he and God are allies, working together to teach everyone, whether Jew or Foreigner. The second statement is that

he teaches "nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place," pointing out that everything he taught can be found in the scripture Agrippa studied. The third point is the same in all of Paul's sermons, *"that the Christ was to suffer, and that by reason of His resurrection from the dead, He would be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles"* (Acts 26:22-23). The suggestion that all the plots of the Jew had failed because God was his ally and helper was clear to both Festus and Agrippa. Their reaction? "Festus said in a loud voice, "Paul, you are out of your mind! Your great learning is driving you mad" (Acts 26:24). But Agrippa said, "In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian" (Acts 26:28). Agrippa never found that "short time."

The Holy Spirit sees that Agrippa believed Moses, the prophets, and the reasoning in Paul's arguments. But he failed to act on that belief. As Jerusalem fell to Rome in 70 CE, Agrippa stood with Tulus, the Commander of the Roman Legions.