

Use of the Goads Metaphor by Jesus in Acts

In the original manuscript, Luke does not include the Lord's use of the Greek metaphor in Acts 9:5 nor Paul's question in Acts 9:6. These are later additions to the inferior manuscript used to translate the King James.

The New American Standard deletes these glosses and correctly translates the passage beginning in:

Acts 9:5 - And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And He said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting,

Acts 9:6 - but rise, and enter the city, and it shall be told you what you must do."

When Paul went to Jerusalem in Acts 2:1 he was recognized by the Jewish community as one who had taught against the Mosaic Law and had supposedly brought Gentiles into the temple. Paul had not taken Gentiles into the temple but he had evangelized them, as well as many Jews, teaching grace in place of the Law. Once spotted, the Jewish mob captured Paul and were about to kill him when a Roman commander named Claudius Lysias stepped in to save him. Gaining the officer's permission, Paul addressed the mob in the Hebrew dialect, Aramaic. He gave his personal testimony which included an account of his salvation on the Damascus road:

Acts 22:6 - And it came about that as I was on my way, approaching Damascus about noontime, a very bright light suddenly flashed from heaven all around me,

Acts 22:7 - and I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?'

Acts 22:8 - And I answered, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said to me, 'I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting.' [Note the omission of the goads metaphor.]

Captain Claude, wishing for the Jews to resolve what appeared to him to be a Jewish problem, released Paul to the Sanhedrin so it could conduct an internal investigation, the results of which was the development of a plot to murder Paul.

Captain Claude got wind of it, rescued Paul and transferred him to another venue. He sent Paul to Caesarea to appear before Governor Felix along with a document outlining the problem to the Governor. Felix decided to hear the case and subpoenas the Jewish high priest Ananias. All these things transpire in chapter 23.

The hearing takes place in chapter 24 and results in a no decision which caused Paul to be incarcerated at Caesarea for two years. After that time, Felix was succeeded by Porcius (PORE-she-us) Festus who conducted a trial at which he suggested that Paul return to Jerusalem and be tried there on the charges brought by the Jews.

Paul refused, claiming his Roman *politeuma* privilege of being tried by Caesar, who was incidentally Nero. Paul was returned to custody awaiting his transfer to Rome.

A few days later King Herod Agrippa II of Palestine arrived in Caesarea to visit Festus and was informed by him of the dilemma concerning Paul. Agrippa asked to interview the prisoner.

Festus quickly agreed because he had no charges to bring against Paul and hoped that Agrippa's investigation might reveal one. Paul's testimony before Agrippa is the subject of chapter 26. Paul recounts the circumstances which resulted in his appearance before Agrippa including the portion we have been noting:

Acts 26:11 - ... being furiously enraged at them [the Christians], I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities.

Acts 26:12 - While thus engaged as I was journeying to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests,

Acts 26:13 - at midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining all around me and those who were journeying with me.

Acts 26:14 - And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect of Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'

Please note who is relating the details, who is speaking and who is being quoted. Luke, a Gentile, under the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, is the human author of the book of Acts. The Apostle Paul, a Jew from the tribe of Benjamin, a former Pharisee, and a Roman citizen, is the one who is speaking in the context. Jesus Christ, the Jewish Messiah, is the one who Paul quotes in Acts 26:14.

Neither in the historical account of Paul's encounter with the Lord in Acts 9, nor Paul's recounting of its details before the Jewish mob in Jerusalem in chapter 23, does the Holy Spirit choose to reveal the Lord's use of the goad's metaphor.

Yet, in his hearing before Festus and Agrippa, the Holy Spirit not only inspires Paul to reveal the Lord's entire quote but He also inspires Luke to include it in the book of Acts. Why now?

Jesus Christ in His deity is omniscient and knows the end from the beginning. He knew Paul would one day confront two Roman leaders who would have the power to determine whether he lived or died. They both spoke the Greek language and were thus familiar with popular Greek metaphors and figures of speech. He also knew that Saul was classically educated at the University of Tarsus, and as a Roman citizen who spoke fluent Greek, would understand the implications of the metaphor in light of his hostile attitude toward the church.

In dealing with Saul, Festus, and Agrippa, all unbelievers, the Lord chose an adage familiar with all three thus communicating in their vernacular the futility of taking hostile action against the God of Israel.

But the use of this metaphor with a Jewish audience would be fruitless since most Jews were unfamiliar with the Greek's history, language, or culture. Thus, the full quotation of what Jesus said to Saul is withheld from Luke's historical narrative until Paul confronts two Roman unbelievers who need some way of orienting to what the Apostle says in his defense.

Both Festus and Agrippa were familiar with the idea that one could not cross the gods. Paul does not want them to assume that the issue in conflict was the acceptance or rejection of a Jewish prophet but rather the fact that Paul had heard a voice from heaven proclaiming divine opposition to his actions.

The quote of a metaphor which had attained distinction in Greek culture as an adage, left no doubt in these rulers' minds that Paul was claiming to have had contact with deity.

In Acts 9, Saul understood the metaphor to mean that he was in opposition to God Himself, he was kicking against the goads of divine discipline as a result of persecuting Christians.