

Paul before King Agrippa

Acts 26: 1-20

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Acts is a book of transition — the history of the change of dispensation. This was inaugurated by the downcoming of the Holy Spirit, consequent upon the upgoing of the Man, Jesus Christ.

The great change by the power of God, through the Spirit, is from the earthly to the heavenly. For a time the testimony of God, in the hands of the twelve apostles, lingers at Jerusalem. But, had not our Lord said, "but ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth."

Man had been tested in innocence — he fell; in conscience — and he corrupted his way; under law — and he embraced idolatry; then in grace, in the Person of the Saviour — he crucified Him; finally there was the test by the Spirit in His witness to the glorified Christ. Stephen was the mouthpiece of that testimony and Scripture says, "and they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." Note the intensity of his intercessory spirit and also the spirit of his Master.

The devil had urged the Jews on to silence the voice of the Lord's chief witness. How exultant must the Prince of Demons have been! Yet, to his utter chagrin, the Lord intimated to him in the conversion of Saul of Tarsus — You have taken away my best man, Stephen, I'll take away yours, Saul. This He did, in infinite grace, Saul, was then at the height of his mad career, manifesting that he was a true Benjaminite, "Benjamin shall ravine as a wolf: in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil" (Gen. 49: 27). But between the morning of his devouring and the night of his dividing a work of God had begun in his conscience. The martyrdom of Stephen, undoubtedly, was the starting point of that work — "He maketh the wrath of man to praise Him." "It is hard for thee to kick against the goads." The nagging voice of conscience hurt him keenly but, as the sharpened stick which spurred on the stubborn camel or mule, he redoubled his efforts to extinguish the testimony to the exaltation of the once Crucified Christ. Just then on his way to Damascus heaven was opened by a light shining upon him — just as had the veil of the temple been rent at the death of Jesus, the tomb, too, on His resurrection. So now was heaven opened with the outshining of the light of the glory of Christ.

Saul was smitten to the earth by the light from heaven. Here in his defence before King Agrippa, a quarter of a century of experience in the service of the glorified Son of God behind him, he declared, "at midday, O king, I saw in the way a *light from heaven*, above the brightness of the sun." In Acts 9, "a light from heaven" in Acts 22, "a great light from heaven." Here, not an anti-meridian, a light above the brightness of the noon-day sun. There had been no change in the light — rather there had been in his apprehension, for he had grown spiritually since the light had shone upon him and into his heart. He wrote the saints in Corinth, "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4: 6). No wonder that he said, "I could not see for the glory of that light" (Acts 22: 11).

Two great things took place in Saul that day.

1. He learned the intimate link between the persecute saints on earth and their Head in heaven. "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest" was the answer to his question, "who art Thou Lord?"

2. He accepted His claims over him, "What shall I do, Lord."

So our Lord made known the purpose of His appearing to him: "to make thee a minister and witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in which I shall appear unto thee." Please read verses 16-18.

"Minister" or "Appointed Servant" — a public administration would be committed to him, see Ephesians 3: 8, 9.

"Witness" — the same word as "Martyr" (Phil. 2: 17; 2 Tim. 4: 6).

"Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles" — an entirely new thing, distinct from both Judaism and Paganism, yet to be available to all such. See Romans 1: 16, "to the Jew first and also to the Gentile." "To open their eyes" — that they might so receive the truth of God, as to see themselves as they really are, 2 Cor. 5: 14, "Then were all dead." "That they might turn from darkness" — abysmal ignorance of God, Eph. 4: 18. that in consequence, they would be brought "from the power of Satan" on the one hand, blessed deliverance indeed, and on the other hand they might be brought to God. Blessed freedom from Satan's power, and indescribable introduction to the blessedness of reconciliation. "That they may receive forgiveness of sins," fruit of the redemptive work of Christ in offering Himself as a sacrifice for sins upon the Cross. Also, "an inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Me." How wonderful and magnanimous the blessings for those delivered!

The erstwhile persecutor was "not disobedient unto the heavenly vision." And so he continued his double ministry — the Gospel and the Mystery.