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Abstract

This paper was presented to the 352nd Meeting of the Chicago Society of Biblical Research that was held at Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago on Saturday, October 24, 2009. It describes three stages in the gradual disclosure of Paul’s violence against the church in Acts and explains this gradual disclosure as part of a Lucan agenda to present Paul as a sympathetic figure and to defend the Pauline legacy of Paul as one who suffered for Christ and not as one who caused suffering for Christ’s followers.

I. Introduction

Luke’s Subtle and Gradual Disclosure of Paul’s Violence against the Church has yet to receive an adequate explanation in scholarship. The three stages of Luke’s disclosures may be summarized as follows:

1. Paul arrested Jesus’ followers and intended also to do so in Damascus (Acts 8:3; 9:1–2).
2. Paul “persecuted the Way up to the point of death” (22:4).\(^2\)
3. Not only in Judea but also in cities elsewhere, Paul led efforts to imprison, convict, and execute Jesus’ followers (26:9–11).

These three stages disclose an increasing seriousness and complicity in Paul’s activities in persecuting the followers of the Way. In the first, the reference to Paul’s “breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord” (Acts 9:1) is subtle and proleptic, suspending any mention of the direct action of Paul against the disciples of the Lord. Regarding the second,

\(^1\) Until Acts 13:9 (“Saul, also known as Paul”), Saul is consistently referred to by his Semitic name. After 13:9, however, he is always Paul, except when Saul/Paul recounts his earlier vision of Jesus (Acts 22:7, 13; 26:14). For the sake of consistency, this article will refer to him simply as Paul, except in citations.

\(^2\) Unless otherwise indicated, biblical translations are from the NRSV. A fuller discussion of certain points in this article may be found in Kelhoffer, Persecution, Persuasion and Power: Readiness to Withstand Hardship as a Corroboration of Legitimacy in the New Testament (WUNT 270; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 286–351.
scholarship is not of one mind concerning whether Acts 22:4 clearly depicts Paul as complicit in murders.\(^3\) In the third, however, there is no ambiguity concerning Paul’s admission of murdering the followers of Jesus in 26:10–11.

This article argues that the fuller disclosures in Acts 22 and 26 are consistent with an agenda of presenting Paul as a sympathetic character who suffered unjustly in Acts 9–25. A revelation, such as the one in 26:10–11, occurring already in Acts 8 or 9 would have made it clear from the beginning of Paul’s missionary work that what Paul had earlier been doing to Jesus’ followers in Jerusalem, Judea, and any number of other cities is precisely what the Jews now wish to do to Paul. After Paul has displayed faithfulness and has suffered so much in Acts 9–25, Luke apparently has confidence in 26:10–11 to make a greater disclosure about the long since rehabilitated Paul. The gradual disclosure of Paul’s violence is consistent with an agenda of defending the Pauline legacy. Paul should be remembered primarily as one who suffered for Christ, not as one who had caused suffering for Christ’s followers.

II. Paul as Persecutor of the Church (8:1–3)

Subsequent to the account of Stephen’s murder (6:1–7:50), Acts describes two related developments. One is a “great persecution” (8:2a) against the Jerusalem church and the scattering of all Jesus’ followers, except the apostles, into Judea and Samaria (8:2b).\(^4\) The other development concerns the presentation of Paul, who approved of Stephen’s murder (8:1; cf. 7:58). Ernst Haenchen, among other scholars, argues that “[t]he transformation in the picture of Saul is breathtaking, to say the least. A moment ago he was a youth looking on with approval at the execution [of Stephen]. Now he is the arch-persecutor.”\(^5\) Yet, C. K. Barrett is perhaps wise to be more cautious on this point when he writes that Paul “is presumably the chief agent in the severe persecution of v.

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\(^3\) On this point, see the analysis of Acts 22:4 below.

\(^4\) Richard I. Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 200. Commenting on 8:1, Pervo suggests that “[t]he apostles’ avoidance of flight has the additional advantage of displaying their heroic fearlessness.”

1. * At the very least, Luke portrays Paul as *a* key leader of the persecution, if not its chief.

Previously in Acts, the opposition to Jesus’ followers had affected only recognized leaders of the church, whether apostles (4:1–31; 5:17–42) or Stephen (6:1–7:50). Beginning in 8:3, however, the opposition under Paul’s initiative concerns any and every follower of Jesus: “Saul was attempting to destroy the church entering house after house. Dragging away both men and women, he handed them over to prison.”

The Paul of Acts will later admit that his actions led to the death of some of Jesus’ followers (26:10; cf. 22:4). According to 7:51–53, Stephen’s murderers have no right to consider themselves faithful to the Mosaic law and instead belong to the tainted legacy of those who persecute and murder the prophets. Given the already devastating depiction of Stephen’s murderers, Luke apparently has no need to reinforce this point concerning Paul, whose persecution of the church sets new benchmarks in scope and intensity.

Paul’s legitimacy is equally as dubious as that of Stephen’s killers, if not even more so.

### III. The Necessity That Paul Suffer for Jesus (9:1–19a)

When Paul next resurfaces in Acts, he is “breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord” (9:1). Since much of the church had been scattered outside of Jerusalem, Paul asks for permission to bind and bring to Jerusalem anyone “who belonged to the Way” (9:2) whom he might find in Damascus. As Haenchen notes, it is now Paul and not the high priest who “is the driving spirit of the persecution.”

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7. Gk.: Σαῦλος δὲ ἔλυμαίνετο τὴν ἐκκλησίαν κατὰ τοὺς οἰκους εἰσπορεύόμενος, σύρων τε ἄνδρας καὶ γυναῖκας παρεδίδου εἰς φυλακήν (8:3). The above translation construes the imperfect tense of ἔλυμαίνετο as conative (“attempting to destroy”), depicting an attempted action in the past. Cf. ἐπόρθουν (Gal 1:13b).

8. Cf. Acts 9:13. Acts says nothing more about what happened to those whom Paul arrested. The Paul who would eventually suffer as Jesus’ follower is never depicted in Acts as doing anything to secure their release or to mitigate their punishment (cf. 5:33, 40).

9. Acts 9:1: ἐμπνέων ἀπείλης καὶ φόνου κτλ. The verb ἐμπνέω, which normally denotes “breathing,” can also mean “to inspire” and could perhaps in 9:1 indicate that Paul was not acting alone but “inspiring” such hostile sentiments in others who, with him, would persecute the church. The mention of others’ traveling with Paul to Damascus (οἱ δὲ ἄνδρες οἱ συνοδεύουσες αὐτῷ, 9:7) and Paul’s later and more detailed disclosures about his work as persecutor and possibly killing Jesus’ followers (22:6; 26:10–11) also suggest this possibility. See further below on Acts 26:10–11.

10. Relative to the preceding narrative, Paul’s request for letters to travel to Damascus in Syria (9:2) is somewhat surprising. According to Acts 8:2, the disciples were scattered only as far as Judea and Samaria, not north of the Galilee into Syrian Damascus. Luke
Earlier in Acts, Stephen’s response to his accusers had implicitly linked killing Jesus with the injustice of persecuting his followers (cf. 7:52b). Upon appearing to Paul in a vision, Jesus’ first statements to Paul make this association explicit: “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? . . . I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting” (9:4b, 5b). This assertion posits value to the suffering of Jesus’ followers but attributes shame rather than honor to the perpetrator. Paul had not been justly punishing a heretical Jewish movement but was rather persecuting Jesus, who speaks from heaven. In two later speeches, Paul will repeat Jesus’ statement that he was persecuting Jesus. In the present context, Jesus instructs Paul to enter the city where he had intended to persecute Christians and to learn there what he “must do” (ὅτί σε δεῖ ποιεῖν, 9:6).

Luke accompanies Paul’s sudden and dramatic role reversal with an explanation that the Lord revealed in visions to Paul and to a believer named Ananias that they are to meet in Damascus (9:7–12). The following instructions from Jesus further mitigate Ananias’ misgivings about Paul’s notorious standing as persecutor of the church and also highlight Paul’s future suffering: “Go, for he is my chosen instrument to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel; [16] for I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name” (9:15–16). The Lukan Jesus states that Paul’s calling and conversion have two essential, and seemingly inseparable, components. Paul will make Jesus known (9:15) and will suffer for Jesus (9:16). The Paul who had inflicted suffering on Jesus’ followers (cf. 8:3; 9:1, 13) must now be prepared to suffer. Jakob Jervell astutely notes the change that 9:16 makes to later states, however, that Jesus’ followers had been scattered “as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch” (Acts 11:19).

\[\text{11} \text{ Haenchen, Acts, 319–320.} \]
\[\text{13} \text{ Cf. Acts 9:26, where the disciples in Jerusalem are still “all afraid of him [Saul], for they did not believe that he was a disciple.”} \]
\[\text{14} \text{ Scholars debate whether Paul’s encounter with the risen Jesus was originally a “calling” within Judaism or a “conversion” to a different religion. I agree with Anna Maria Schwemer that it was both a calling and a conversion. She writes, “Man darf die ‘Berufung’ nicht gegen die ‘Bekehrung’ ausspielen, denn für Paulus war seine Begegnung mit dem Auferstandenen bides. Er versteht seine Berufung zum Heidenapostel als eine Lebenswende (vgl. das zweimalige ποτε – νῦν in Gal 1,13.23), die auch sein Gesetzesverständnis betraf (Phil 3,5–9).” See her article “Erinnerung und Legende: Die Berufung des Paulus und ihre Darstellung in der Apostelgeschichte,” in: Memory in the Bible and Antiquity (WUNT 212; ed. Stephen C. Barton et al.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 281 n. 23.} \]
the earlier commissioning in Acts 1:8. Whereas Jesus’ original followers, in particular the apostles, received the call, Paul actually carries it out.  

The depictions of what is “necessary” (δεῖ) for Paul to do in Acts 9:6 and 9:16 merit brief exploration relative to numerous similar uses of δεῖ in Luke-Acts. As Clare K. Rothschild notes, the standard scholarly interpretation holds that most uses of δεῖ in Luke-Acts, several of which reflect Lukan redaction, highlight the “divine control of history.” Seeking to refine this somewhat vague concept in light of ancient rhetoric, Rothschild argues that such uses of δεῖ serve to emphasize that “[p]redicted events are not arbitrary, and therefore must have taken place in the manner described.” Rothschild’s argument that in Luke-Acts δεῖ usually highlights “the credibility of an unfamiliar, controversial or otherwise implausible event of the narrative” clarifies the point of contrast she draws with the scholarly consensus. Concerning Acts 9:6 (the first reference to what Paul “must” [δεῖ] do; cf. 9:16), Rothschild notes how “the author cleverly defends the credibility of all of Paul’s upcoming actions in this highly incredible episode through the suggestion that each action is as certain as necessity itself.”

Furthermore, the notion that Paul was the notorious persecutor of the church but must (δεῖ, 9:16) now suffer for Jesus exemplifies Rothschild’s thesis concerning an “unfamiliar, controversial or otherwise implausible” development in Acts. Whereas Ananias fears that Paul will cause suffering, Christ assures him that it is now Paul who will suffer for his name. Rudolf Pesch encapsulates well this surprising development: “Der ehemalige Verfolger wird verfolgt werden.” It thus follows that in Acts 9:16 the necessity of Paul’s suffering lends credibility to the wholly unanticipated development that Jesus chose such a notorious persecutor to suffer for and bear witness to his name (9:15).

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22 Pesch, Apostelgeschichte, 1:307.
Concerning the particular instances in Luke-Acts when suffering is necessary, δεῖ occurs in the following eleven passages, including Acts 9:6, 16:23

The Son of Man must undergo great suffering (δεῖ τὸν Υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου πολλὰ παθεῖν), and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. (Luke 9:22)

Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way (δεῖ με . . . πορεύεσθαι), because it is not possible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.’ (Luke 13:33)

But first he [the Son of Man] must endure much suffering (δεῖ αὐτὸν πολλὰ παθεῖν) and be rejected by this generation. (Luke 17:25)

When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first (δεῖ γὰρ ταύτα γενέσθαι πρῶτον), but the end will not follow immediately. (Luke 21:9)

The Son of Man must be handed over (δεῖ παραδοθῆναι) to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.” (Luke 24:7)

Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer (ἔδει παθεῖν) these things and then enter into his glory?” (Luke 24:26)

But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God (πειθαρχεῖν δεῖ) rather than human beings.” (Acts 5:29)

But enter the city, and you will be told what you must do (ὅ τί σε δεῖ ποιεῖν). (Acts 9:6)

For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name (ὅσα δεῖ αὐτὸν ὑπὲρ τοῦ ονόματός μου παθεῖν).” (Acts 9:16)

There they [Paul and Barnabas] strengthened the souls of the disciples and encouraged them to continue in the faith, saying, “It is necessary that through many persecutions we enter the kingdom of God (διὰ πολλῶν θλίψεων δεῖ ἡμᾶς εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ).” (Acts 14:22)

[Paul was] explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer (τὸν χριστὸν ἔδει παθεῖν) and to rise from the dead. (Acts 17:3a)

Six of these passages highlight the necessity—and, rhetorically, the plausibility—of Jesus’ suffering as part of fulfilling God’s redemptive plan (Luke 9:22; 13:33; 17:25; 24:7, 26; Acts 17:3a). The Lukan eschatological discourse emphasizes the necessity that Jesus’ followers will endure periods of

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“wars and insurrections.” Although it would be unusual for Jews to disregard the Sanhedrin’s command, Peter and the apostles are nevertheless ready to accept whatever consequences result from the imperative (δεῖ) that they obey God rather than the Jewish leaders who arrested them and commanded that they keep silent (Acts 5:29; cf. 4:19). These earlier references in Luke-Acts place the suffering expected of Paul (Acts 9:6, 16) in continuity with God’s plan for Jesus’ passion, the prediction concerning his followers’ suffering (Luke 21:9, 12), and the apostles’ resolve before the threats of the Sanhedrin (Acts 5:29). Later in Acts, Paul and Barnabas exhort the necessity “that through many persecutions we enter the kingdom of God” (14:22). This exhortation illustrates that Paul himself had embraced Jesus’ prediction to Ananias concerning his future suffering (cf. 9:16) and warned that other believers must also be prepared to suffer.

IV. Paul’s Speech to the Crowd in Jerusalem: Paul as Persecutor Revisited (22:1–22)

The second time Acts mentions Paul as a former persecutor is in Paul’s speech subsequent to his arrest in Jerusalem (cf. 21:15–40). The speech highlights several points narrated earlier in Acts, including both Paul’s past as persecutor of the church and his previous visit to Jerusalem. At times, this speech adds new details or offers a different version of events. Paul repeats Jesus’ assertion that Paul had actually been persecuting him (22:7–8; cf. 9:4–5; 26:12–15). For the first time, moreover, Paul suggests that he might have killed some of Jesus’ followers. Another novel detail in this speech is the statement attributed to Ananias that Paul “will be a witness to him [Jesus] (μάρτυς αὐτῷ) to all people (πρὸς πάντας ἀνθρώπους) of what you [Paul] have seen and heard” (22:15; cf. 9:17).

The subsequent verses elaborate the reason for Paul’s earlier departure from Jerusalem (22:17–21). Different from 9:29–30, there is now no mention of the desire of “the Hellenists” to kill Paul. Instead, Jesus instructs Paul to leave Jerusalem because the people there will not accept Paul’s testimony (μαρτυρία, 22:18; cf. 28:26–28). In other words, an allegation of the Jews’ disbelief (22:18) replaces the earlier claim of the Jews’ persecution as the reason for Paul’s

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24 Luke 21:9. See also Luke 21:12: “But before all this occurs, they will assault and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name.”

25 To the depicted audience, the information was presumably necessary due to Paul’s previous short stay in Jerusalem, which had been abruptly ended by “the Hellenists” who wanted to kill him (cf. 9:29–30; 22:17–21).

26 Gk.: ἐδίωξα ἕχρι θανάτου, Acts 22:4; cf. 8:3; 9:1; on this point, see further the discussion of 26:9–11. Additionally, characterizing Paul as “zealous” while mentioning his persecution occurs in both Acts 22:3 (ζηλωτὴς ὑπάρχων) and Gal 1:14b (ζηλωτὴς ὑπάρχων).
departure from Jerusalem (9:29–30). Paul also alludes to his (limited) role in the murder of Stephen (22:19–20). His allusion and the Lord’s response (22:18–21) suggest that the people would listen neither to Stephen nor, subsequently, to Paul when he was in Jerusalem.

Paul’s final words to the crowd cite Jesus’ heretofore unreported command to Paul: “Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.”27 When Paul specifies that Jesus had indeed sent him out of Jerusalem, where the people would not listen, “far away to the Gentiles” (22:21; cf. 22:18), the crowd protests, and their protest brings his speech to an abrupt end with renewed calls for Paul to be killed (22:22). Objections to Paul’s preaching to the Gentiles build upon earlier Lukan accusations of the Jews’ jealousy (Acts 13:45; 17:5a; cf. 5:17).


V. New Disclosures Implicating Paul in the Death of Christians (26:1–11)

The third of three accounts of Paul’s earlier persecutions appears in Paul’s speech before Agrippa, Bernice, and Festus (26:2–23). This speech recounts numerous points covered in Acts 9:1–30 and 22:1–22 but adds previously undisclosed details about the extent of Paul’s persecutions against the church that culminated in the killing of Christians. At 26:9–11, the presentation of Paul as a former persecutor highlights even more explicitly than the earlier two accounts Paul’s efforts against the church. As noted above, Acts first presents Paul’s imprisoning both men and women (8:3; 9:1) as an escalation in aggression that had previously been restricted to the apostles and Stephen. The only hint in Acts 8–9 that Paul may have killed any disciples is the proleptic characterization of him as “breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord” (9:1). This characterization, however, does not specify that Paul had in fact taken any such action. At 22:4 (“I persecuted to the point of death” [ἐδίωξα ἄχρι θανάτου]), Luke offers a somewhat more explicit hint of Paul’s intent to kill Jesus’ followers, if not indeed Paul’s having done so. Now at 26:10, Paul openly acknowledges that his persecutions resulted in the death of Jesus’ followers: “I not only locked up many of the saints in prison but also cast my vote against them when they were being condemned to death.” Whereas Acts has heretofore reported the deaths of only two Christians (Stephen and

James), Barrett notes that Acts 26:10 “seems to imply that a number of Christians were put to death.”

For the first time in Acts Paul confesses that he became an instigator of persecutions that included imprisonment, proceedings requiring a vote from Paul and others, and execution of Jesus’ followers. By contrast, Luke initially presents Paul as playing only a minor, if also approving, role in the murder of Stephen (7:58–8:1). Haenchen notes this contrast between 7:58–8:1 and 26:10 but finds 26:10 “in agreement with the allusions of 22.4.” Yet, Hans Conzelmann differs with Haenchen and argues that “Paul’s activity as a persecutor is intensified here over against 22:3–4.” The question of whether 26:10 stands in continuity with 22:4 (so Haenchen) or offers a new disclosure (so Conzelmann) hangs on whether the phrase ἐδίωξα ἂχρι θανάτου (22:4) presents Paul as actually killing Christians. In my opinion, 22:4 is not specific enough to concede the better part of the argument to either Haenchen or Conzelmann. In either case, the difference between the initial characterizations of Paul in Acts 8–9 and these later disclosures is clear: only toward the end of Acts does Luke reveal the most unsettling details about Paul’s ignominious past.

In 26:11b, moreover, the plural πόλεις (“cities”) presents Damascus (cf. 26:12) as only one of a number of cities outside Judea to which Paul had traveled to persecute the church: “By punishing them often in all the synagogues I tried to force them to blaspheme; and since I was so furiously enraged at them, I pursued them even to foreign cities (καὶ εἰς τὰς ἔξω πόλεις).” Blaspheming is an action that Acts twice ascribes to Jews who opposed Paul or his message (13:45; 18:6a; cf. 19:37) and is precisely what Paul now admits he tried to compel Jesus’ followers to do (26:11).

VI. Conclusion: Luke’s Subtle and Gradual Disclosure of Paul’s Violence against Christians as an Apology for the Pauline Legacy

The candor reflected in Acts 26:9–11 about the extent of Paul’s oppression of the church comes as quite a surprise at this late point in Acts. One would never guess from either Acts 9 or 22 that when Paul requested from the high priest “letters to the synagogues at Damascus” (9:1–2; cf. 22:4–5), Paul had already journeyed to other “cities” outside Judea to persecute the church while imprisoning, trying, and executing some followers of the Way. On the

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31 Acts 26:11. The following verse (26:12) mentions Paul’s trip to Damascus after visiting the other πόλεις.
33 Although Acts 8:3 and 9:1 specify no geographical referents for Paul’s persecutions, there is no reason to infer that Paul had traveled far from Jerusalem, let
contrary, it is only after Paul’s self-disclosures in 22:4 and especially in 26:10–11 that the reader understands that what Paul had ostensibly been doing to Jesus’ followers in Jerusalem, Judea, and any number of other cities is precisely what from Acts 9:20 onward numerous Jews wish to do to Paul. Throughout Acts 9–21 (if not 9–25), Paul repeatedly endures hardships and persecutions from Jews, some of whom wish to kill him. However, Luke has not yet disclosed that Paul faces the very dangers he had inflicted on numerous followers of the Way. Paul the persecuted former persecutor has repeatedly been receiving a taste of his own medicine.

This peculiarity about the Lukan depictions of Paul invites an explanation for why Luke chooses to reveal in stages the extent of Paul’s persecutions against the church. These stages in Acts 8–9, 22, and 26 may be summarized as follows:

1. Paul arrested Jesus’ followers and intended to do so also in Damascus (8:3; 9:1–2). The reference to Paul’s “breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord” (9:1) is proleptic but bespeaks no particular violent action.

2. The statement that Paul “persecuted the [lit.: this] Way up to the point of death” (22:4) indicates that Paul intended to kill Jesus’ followers and perhaps also that he had actually done so.

3. Not only in Judea but also in cities elsewhere prior to traveling to Damascus, Paul led efforts to imprison, convict and execute Jesus’ followers (26:9–11).

A likely explanation for why Luke waits until nearly the end of his narrative to disclose this additional information about Paul, whose persecutions of Christians resulted in not only imprisonments but also executions, may be deduced from Luke’s marked interest in questions of legitimation as derived from persecuting or being persecuted. In his numerous negative depictions of Jews because they killed Jesus and unjustly persecute Jesus’ followers, Luke makes it abundantly clear that he understands—and makes arguments based upon—the corroboration of legitimacy that is at stake in claims to unjust suffering. Luke’s argument that Paul suffers unjustly at the hands of jealous Jews (13:45; cf. 5:17) would presumably have been less compelling if already in Acts 8–9 Luke had disclosed that Paul simply faces the threats of what he had actually done to others. In particular, the picture of Paul’s casting his vote (κατήνεγκα ψήφον, 26:10b) points to his working with other Jews in condemning Jesus’ followers. According to Acts, Paul who had conspired with Jews to kill Jesus’ followers repeatedly must face attempts on his own life from alone outside of Judea. On the contrary, Paul’s journey to Damascus seems to be something new.
Jews. Richard I. Pervo notes, moreover, that in the present context Luke’s depiction of Paul no longer reflects negatively on Paul but rather against Paul’s unrepentant co-conspirators who still want to kill Paul. Pervo comments, “Luke emphasizes Paul’s status as an authorized agent of the Jewish leadership, which must thus bear responsibility for these murders, rather than portraying him as an opponent of the Jesus movement who acted on his own initiative.”

In response, however, a reader not sympathetic to Luke’s valuation of Paul’s suffering could easily object that Paul the former persecutor merits neither sympathy nor confirmation of his standing as Christ’s appointed herald since Paul, who had suffered at the hands of Jews, had himself conspired with other Jews against the Jesus movement.

Apparently Luke takes a more subtle approach, regarding it as more compelling to make a fuller disclosure about Paul’s previous misdeeds toward the end of this work after Paul had acquired sufficient clout by serving and suffering for Jesus. If this inference is correct, Luke would betray a concern reflected also by the deuto-Pauline author of First Timothy, who makes excuses for Paul’s past as persecutor because he “acted ignorantly in unbelief” (1 Tim 1:13). This deuto-Pauline depiction of the apostle represents a novel development beyond the references to Paul’s past as persecutor in the undisputed letters (cf. 1 Cor 15:9–10; Phil 3:2–7; Gal 1:13–24) and apologetically attempts to minimize the negative implications of Paul’s past for subsequent reception(s) of the Pauline legacy. Luke’s making the fullest disclosure of Paul’s persecutions toward the end of Acts, after Paul has proven himself as Jesus’ faithful and persecuted servant, arguably reflects an analogous agenda by another post-Pauline Paulinist. Whereas in First Timothy Paul receives exoneration because of his ignorance and unbelief, Paul’s standing in Acts is corroborated because he embraces his calling to suffer “for the sake of [Jesus’] name” (9:16).

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