

Acts 26:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.

Analysis

I punished them oft in every synagogue—Paul's relentless persecution targeted Christians in the very places of worship where they still gathered. The Greek ἀναγκάζω (anagkazo, compelled) reveals physical coercion, not mere persuasion. **Compelled them to blaspheme** meant forcing believers under torture to curse Jesus as Lord—a direct assault on their confession that 'Jesus is Lord' (1 Cor 12:3). The phrase **exceedingly mad** (περισσῶς ἐμμανόμενος, perissos emmainomenos) depicts Paul's fury as irrational rage, religious fanaticism blinding him to truth.

Paul's testimony before Agrippa doesn't minimize his guilt but magnifies God's grace. The man who 'breathed out threatenings and slaughter' (Acts 9:1) now proclaims the gospel to kings. **Even unto strange cities** shows persecution extending beyond Jerusalem to Damascus and likely other regions—systematic, organized violence against the church. This brutal past made Paul forever humble, calling himself 'chief of sinners' (1 Tim 1:15).

Historical Context

Paul (then Saul) led persecution circa AD 32-34, authorized by the Sanhedrin to hunt Christians in synagogues throughout Judea and Syria. The 'strange cities' included Damascus, where his conversion interrupted the violent campaign. Forcing believers to blaspheme was particularly heinous in Judaism, showing how far zeal without knowledge had taken him.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does Paul's transparency about his violent past inform how we should share our own testimonies of God's transforming grace?
2. In what ways can religious zeal become 'exceedingly mad' when divorced from true knowledge of God?

Interlinear Text

καὶ κατὰ πάσας τὰς συναγωγὰς πολλάκις τιμωρῶν
And **in** **every** G3588 **synagogue** **oft** **I punished**
G2532 G2596 G3956 G4864 G4178 G5097

αὐτοῖς ἠνάγκαζον βλασφημεῖν περισσῶς τε
them **and compelled** **them to blaspheme** **exceedingly** **and**
G846 G315 G987 G4057 G5037

ἐμμαινόμενος αὐτοῖς ἐδίωκον ἕως καὶ εἰς τὰς ἔξω
being **them** **I persecuted** G2193 **And** **unto** G3588 **strange**
G1693 G846 G1377 G2532 G1519 G1854

πόλεις
cities
G4172

Additional Cross-References

Acts 13:45 (Parallel theme): But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.

Acts 22:19 (Parallel theme): And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee:

Matthew 10:17 (Parallel theme): But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues;

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