

ACTS CHAPTER 9

Hebraism vs. Hellenism

Hebraism - those born in Israel.

Hellenistic Jews - born in the Greek empire, but Jewish.

"I will stir up thy sons, O Zion, against thy sons, O Greece" (Zech 9:13).

(For example: Judas Maccabeus against Antiochus Ephiphanes.)

Sadducees - were Hellenists (materialistic, worldly, deny the super-natural).

Pharisees - were the Hebraists (strictly adhered to the Law, espoused Moses, believed in angels and resurrection, they were the supernaturalists).

Acts 9 SURRENDER

Acts 9:1-9

"But Saul, still breathing out threat and murder to the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters of credit to Damascus, to the synagogues there, so that if he found any of The Way there, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. As he journeyed he came near Damascus. Suddenly a light from heaven flashed round about him. He fell on the ground and he heard a voice saying to him, `Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' He said, `Who, are you, sir?' He said, `I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But rise; go into the city, and you will be told what to do.' His fellow-travellers stood speechless in amazement, because they heard the voice but saw no one. So Saul rose from the ground but when his eyes were opened he could see nothing. So they took him by the hand and led him into Damascus. And for three days he could not see, nor did he eat or drink anything."

Tarsus

Free Greek city, having

received its liberty from Mark Antony;

received title of "metropolis" of Cilicia, as well as other privileges, conferred by Augustus.

The great university of its time; surpassed even Athens and Alexandria in its zeal for philosophy; derived its civilization, and its origin, from Greece, having been founded by an Argive colony.

Saul

Father and mother: Hebrews;

Of the Pharisees (not Sadducees).

Raised in the Hellenistic culture.

Sent to Jerusalem to study under Gamaliel.

He is on the Sanhedrin,

Sanhedrin governs not only over Jerusalem, but over all Judaism.

Saul, a Pharisee, was a member of the Sanhedrin, Saul heard Stephen's presentation.

We last saw Saul in 8:3, where it says that he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison; here he continues and expands this work.

Saul went to the Sadducean High Priest for letters of authority against those who, while antagonistic to the ancient ritual of his people, nevertheless held to the spiritual verities of which he himself held...

In Philippians 3, Saul (Paul) gives us his background,

he was circumcised the eighth day,

of the stock of Israel,

of the tribe of Benjamin,

a Hebrew of the Hebrews;

concerning the law, a Pharisee;

concerning zeal, persecuting the church;

concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

Galatians 1:13 adds more: For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.

Saul on the road to Damascus

1) Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest 2) and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

“And Saul” - again the connective.

“Breathing out” – lit: “Breathing hard still.”

He has motivation behind his commitments. Was convinced he was doing God's will in eradicating the 'sect' called Christians.

Saul's Conversion

Other scripture references recount this experience and include some details not recorded here.

from what Paul says about this experience in Acts 26:12-18 and 1 Corinthians 9:1 and 15:8;

from what Barnabas says about Saul's experience in Acts 9:27, and

from what Ananias says about Saul's experience in Acts 9:17,

He insists in Galatians 1:11-12, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.

“Goads” - Saul was sincere, fighting whom he believed was an enemy of Judaism, the Law of Moses.

Acts 16:14 Hints that there is a pricking going on inside Saul (perhaps the arguments of Stephen still echoed in his ears).

Something about Stephen lingered in Paul's mind and would not be banished.

How could a bad man die like that?

To quell his doubts Saul (Paul) plunged into the most violent action possible.

First he persecuted the Christians in Jerusalem.

This only made matters worse. Again he asked himself what secret these simple people had which made them face peril and suffering and loss serene and unafraid.

Driving himself on, he went to the Sanhedrin.

The high priest mentioned here is Caiaphas.

Recently an urn was found in Jerusalem inscribed with the name of this high priest and positively dated to this period.

These are the first physical remains (such as bones or ashes) of a specific person mentioned in the New Testament.

Letters: Sanhedrin had jurisdiction beyond Jerusalem.

The writ of the Sanhedrin ran wherever there were Jews.

Paul had heard that certain of the Christians had escaped to Damascus and he asked for letters of credit that he might go to Damascus and extradite them.

“This way” - 4x used: here, **19:9, 23; 24:22.**

Christianity is referred to as the Way;

this seems to be the earliest "name" for the Christian movement, and a fitting one - used five times in Acts.

Christianity is more than a belief or a set of opinions or doctrines; it is a way of living as well as believing.

Damascus was the capital of Syria.

It was about 140 miles from Jerusalem to Damascus.

The journey would be made on foot and would take about a week.

Paul's only companions were the officers of the Sanhedrin, a kind of police force.

Because he was a Pharisee, he could have nothing to do with them; so he walked alone; and as he walked he thought, because there was nothing else to do.

The way went through Galilee which brought Jesus even more vividly to Paul's mind.

He eventually came near Damascus, one of the oldest cities in the world.

God confronts Paul on the road to Damascus

3) As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4) He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

5) "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

6) "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

Just before Damascus the road climbed Mount Hermon and below lay Damascus, a lovely white city in a green plain, "a handful of pearls in a goblet of emerald."

That region had a characteristic that when the hot air of the plain met the cold air of the mountain range, violent electrical storms resulted.

Just as Paul came through that area, a lightning storm struck

Out of the storm Christ spoke to Paul.

In that moment the long battle was over and Paul surrendered to Christ.

"I am Jesus" - name from before birth.. "At the name of Jesus, every knee should bow..."

"Whom thou persecutest":

NOTE:

1) Christ and His people are one.

He felt every throb of Stephen's pain.

2) ..that against which you are fighting is not the zeal of mistaken fanatics; it is the march of God through history.

Cf. 6:8,9. Stephen's conflict was with the Hellenists, not with the Hebrews:

his fight was with the Sadducees.

Christ spoke to him in the Hebrew tongue (Cf. 22:6-16; 26:9-18).

Saul saw as well as heard: v. 17, v. 27; 22:14; 26:16.

Saul never forgave himself: 1 Cor 15:9; Gal 1:13.

Saul was not the first of his family to be saved: "My kinsmen...who also were in Christ before me" (Rom 16).

This spectacular event is and was unusual;

God does not normally confront sinners with a heavenly light and an audible voice from heaven.

Acts 26:13 Paul tells us that this happened at mid-day, when the sun shines at its brightest.

Saul's reaction was simply to fall to the ground;

this wasn't honor or reverence for God, it was simply a reaction of survival - he was terrified at the heavenly light.

Jesus didn't have to say anything more than I am Jesus

Saul knew exactly who He was, even though "Jesus" was a fairly common name.

Saul had undoubtedly heard Jesus teach in Jerusalem

He may have, as a probable member of the Sanhedrin, sat in on the trial of Jesus before His crucifixion.

The rabbis of Saul's day believed that God no longer spoke to man directly, as He did in the days of the prophets.

However, they believed that one could hear the "echo" of God's voice, what they called "the daughter of the voice of God."

When God repeats a name twice, it is to display deep emotion, but not necessarily anger (as in the Martha, Martha of Luke 10:41 and the Jerusalem, Jerusalem of Matthew 23:37).

Why are you persecuting Me:

Saul is confronted by the true nature of his crime: he is persecuting God, not man.

Saul thought that he was doing God a service in his vicious attacks on Christians; but now he discovers that he has been fighting against God.

Much of the worst persecution and torture ever practiced has been done by men who were convinced they were doing God a service.

Saul wasn't motivated by his hate for the Christians but by his desire to defend and please God. When he discovered his error, he repented – turned immediately.

A recent Gallup Survey asked people to choose three questions they would most like to ask God.

The top five responses:

Will there ever be lasting world peace?

How can I be a better person?

What does the future hold for me and my family?

Will there ever be a cure for all diseases?

Why is there suffering in the world?

All these questions are answered in the Bible; but they really aren't the most important questions for us to ask.

Saul asks the right questions!

Who are You, Lord?

We must ask that question with a humble heart, and ask it to God. Jesus shows us exactly who God is. It is our answer to that question that determines our eternity.

What do You want me to do?

Few dare to really ask God this question; but when we ask it, we must ask it with submission and determined obedience.

Saul's question was personal. Lord, what do You want me to do?

We often are quite interested in what God wants others to do; but the surrendered heart asks, "Lord, what do You want me to do?"

The insertion of it is hard for you to kick against the goads in 9:5-6 is accurate, but its not in Luke's original text.

The words were added by scribes, based on Acts 22:10 and 26:14, who thinking they were doing God a favor by putting it in here also.

A goad was a long, extremely sharp stick that was used to get an ox going the way you wanted him to when you were plowing.

The phrase 'It is hard for you' shows the great love of Jesus;

Jesus, the one being persecuted, is concerned over the effect Saul's stubborn rebellion is having on Saul.

The fact that Saul was trembling and astonished by all of this reminds us that it is not always pleasant to encounter heaven dramatically; Saul was terrified by this experience,

There were no warm, gushy feelings and emotions.

Jesus responds to Saul's question Lord, what do You want me to do by telling him only what to do immediately.

This is often the character of God's direction in our lives; He directs us one step at a time instead of laying out the details of the grand plan at once.

There is all of Christianity in what the Risen Christ said to Paul, "Go into the city, and you will be told what to do."

Up to this moment Paul had been doing what he liked, what he thought best, what his will dictated.

From this time forward he would be told what to do.

The Christian is a man who has ceased to do what he wants to do and who has begun to do what Christ wants him to do.

What did Saul look like?

An old apocryphal book, dating to the end of the first century, describes Paul as: "

A man of moderate stature,

with crisp hair,

crooked legs,

blue eyes,

large knit brows,

and long nose,

at times looking like a man,

at times like an angel."

Saul immediately after the Damascus road

7) The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. 8) Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. 9) For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

Paul went into Damascus a changed man.

He had come intending to enter Damascus like an avenging fury.

He entered led by the hand, blind and helpless by men he would not associate with.

Saul means “destroyer,”

Paul means “builder.”

Three days:

- Abraham (Isaac dead to him for) **Gen 22:4**
- Joseph (dreams in prison) **Gen 40:8-20**
- Esther / Mordecai (fasted 3 days) **Est 4:16**
- Jonah (in the fish) **Jonah 1:17**
- Christ (in the tomb) **Matt 12:40**
- Nation Israel (asks Jesus to return, **Matt 23:37-39 / Zech 12:10**)
Hos 6:2

The experience was incomprehensible to Saul's traveling companions;

Saul opened his eyes (presumably shut tight in a terrified reaction to the heavenly light), he still could not see.

Thorn in the Flesh: mentioned in 2 Cor 12:7.

Hint in Gal 4:13-15 that it is an eye problem. (Also in Gal 6:11)

Perhaps, he never fully recovered from this Damascus road blinding.

What did Paul do for these three days?

He did not eat nor drink, probably a lot of thinking (Phil 3:7; Gal 2:20).

Gal 2:20: “I have been crucified with Christ.” (Hebraism) “and it is no longer I that live” (Hellenism, culture) “but Christ liveth in me” (Christianity)

Only to sit in a blind silence - a rather humbling experience, and a time when Saul must have challenged all his previous ideas about who God was and what pleased God.

In the three days of blindness and deprivation, Saul was dying to himself. It would only be after the three days of dying that he would be raised to new life.

A CHRISTIAN WELCOME

Acts 9:10-18

"There was a disciple in Damascus called Ananias, and the Lord said to him in a vision, 'Ananias.' He said, 'Here am I Lord.' The Lord said to him, 'Get up and go to the street called 'Straight'; inquire in Judas' house for a man called Saul, a man from Tarsus. For, look you, he is praying; and he has seen a man called Ananias coming and putting his hands on him so that he may get back his sight.' Ananias answered, 'Lord, I have heard from many about this man. They have told me all the hurt he has done to the saints at Jerusalem. They have told me too how he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call upon your name.' The Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is a chosen instrument for my work. He is chosen to carry my name before peoples and kings and before the sons of Israel. I will tell him all he must suffer for my name's sake.' So Ananias went away and came to the house. He put his hands on him and said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord--Jesus who appeared to you in the way on which you were going--has sent me that you may get your sight back and so that you may be filled with the Holy Spirit.' Thereupon things like scales fell from his eyes and he got his sight back again. He rose and was baptized; and he took food and his strength increased."

Church owes Paul to the prayer of Stephen AND to the brotherliness of Ananias.

Ananias, I need you !

10) In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!"

"Yes, Lord," he answered.

11) The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. 12) In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."

The Lord speaks in an entirely different character and way when He speaks to Ananias than when He spoke to Saul;

Saul had a bold, almost violent confrontation from God;

Ananias hears the voice of God sweetly in a vision,

God calls and Ananias responds with no show of surprise or alarm – like it was a regular occurrence

Ananias responds like he is answering a roommate

God's instructions to Ananias are clear,

God tells Ananias about Saul's vision of Ananias' own vision!

Behold, he is praying:

Paul had never really prayed before;

he merely repeated formal prayers. His prayers were not spiritual;

he had never prayed with Jesus as mediator;

he had never prayed in Jesus' name; and his own heart was proud and far from God.

He had said many prayers, but had never prayed.

Joh 16:23 And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you.

Joh 16:24 Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.

Joh 16:25 These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs: but the time cometh, when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall shew you plainly of the Father.

Joh 16:26 At that day ye shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you:

Joh 16:27 For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God.

Ananias is told that he must go and help Saul

He is directed to the street called "Straight."

This was a great street that ran straight from the east to the west of Damascus.

It was divided by Corinthian columns into three avenues,

a center part where the traffic ran, and

two side-walks where the pedestrians thronged and the merchant-men sat in their little booths and plied their trade.

Cf. Acts 22:12-21

Act 22:12 *And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there,*

Ananias, a Christian, was a devout Jew –with a good reputation among the Jews

Why Ananias?

God loves to use people and Ananias was a willing servant

If Paul had been ministered to by an apostle or a prominent person, people might say Paul received his gospel from a man instead of Jesus.

God uses the ordinary man to do His special work..

God overcomes the objections of Ananias

13) "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem.

14) And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."

15) But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. 16) I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

Ananias had heard that this angry and violent persecutor Saul of Tarsus was on his way from Jerusalem;

the Christians of Damascus must have been anxiously preparing for the persecution to come.

Ananias' objections are perfectly logical and well-founded;

but note, they presume that God needs instruction, or at best, counsel - as in, "God, did you know what kind of guy this Saul is?"

God never objects to an honest question but will not enter into a debate – the honest question or confirmation MUST be followed by obedience

God tells Ananias of Saul's calling (a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name...) before we are told that God tells Saul himself.

Notice: God is not use Ananias to inform Saul of God's plan and will for Saul.

God told Ananias what Ananias needed to know for Ananias himself to do God's will and carry out God's plan for Ananias

God considered Saul His chosen vessel long before there appeared anything worthy in Saul to choose.

God knew what He could make of Saul, even when Saul or Ananias didn't know.

Notice God's comment:

For **I will show him** how many things he must suffer for My name's sake.

Saul was going to leave a life of privilege to embrace a higher call, but a call with many sufferings.

Ananias prays for Saul; Saul is healed and receives the Holy Spirit

17) Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord--Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here--has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." 18) Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, 19) and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Ananias first words to Saul were, "Brother Saul."

If God accepted Saul that was good enough for Ananias

IA prime example of Christian love and welcome.

Be filled with the Holy Spirit:

It seems that this is when Saul was actually born again;

here is where he receives the Holy Spirit and is healed from his blindness

- spiritual blindness as much as physical blindness.

God had "broken" Saul; but it wasn't God's intention to leave him broken.

God wanted to break Saul so He could fill him, and leave him filled.

It is often said that Saul was converted on the road to Damascus.

Strictly speaking, this is not the fact. His conversion began in his encounter with the law but it was not accomplished until the gospel entered his heart by faith, and that did not occur on the road, but in the house in Damascus with Ananias.

Then, he began to be strengthened both physically and spiritually; God is concerned about both areas of need.

Observations:

Paul regarded his conversion experience as a pattern for all believers:

Although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. . . . However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life. (1 Timothy 1:13, 16).

We all must be confronted by Jesus, by our sin and rebellion against Him, even that which is done in ignorance; we must humbly wait for the work within us that only He can do.

Saul's conversion reminds that:

- primarily, salvation is something God does in us; what we do is only a response to His work in us.
- God finds us, even when we are not looking for Him.
- that God looks for people to cooperate in the conversion of others, even when they are not really necessary - except as a demonstration of the importance of the family of God.
- it isn't enough that we be broken before God, though that is necessary; God's desire is to only use brokenness as a prelude to filling.

WITNESSING FOR CHRIST

Acts 9:19-22 *"Paul remained with the disciples in Damascus for some time. And immediately he began to preach Jesus in the synagogues, and the burden of his preaching was, 'This is the Son of God.' Everyone who heard him was astonished and kept saying, 'Is not this the man who at Jerusalem sacked those who call on this name? He came here too to bring them bound to the chief priests.' But Saul's power grew ever greater, and he confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus, by proving that this is God's Anointed One."*

This is Luke's account of what happened to Paul after his conversion.

We must also consider Paul's own account of the matter in **Gal.1:15-24**.

- (i) Saul is converted on the Damascus Road.
- (ii) He preaches in Damascus. – he begins to be called Paul
- (iii) He goes away to Arabia (Gal.1:17).
- (iv) He returns and preaches in Damascus for a period of three years (Gal.1:18).
- (v) He goes to Jerusalem.
- (vi) He escapes from Jerusalem to Caesarea.
- (vii) He returns to the regions of Syria and Cilicia (Gal.1:21).

Paul began by doing two things.

He immediately bore his witness in Damascus.

In Damascus there were many Jews and many synagogues. It was in these Damascus synagogues that Paul first lifted up his voice for Christ.

An act of the great courage. It was to these very synagogues that Paul had received his letters of credit as an official agent of the Jewish faith and of the Sanhedrin.

It would have been very much easier to begin his Christian witness somewhere where he was not known and where his past did not stand against him.

Paul with the sanction of the Sanhedrin is delivering the Christian message rather than Christians in the synagogues.

Already he is proclaiming, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ."

The second thing he did is not mentioned by Luke at all

--he went to Arabia (Gal.1:17).

Paul's life had undergone a shattering change. For a time he had to be alone with God.

He needed two things:

guidance for a way that was totally strange and

strength for an overwhelming task that had been given to him.

Saul preaches powerfully in Damascus

20) Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. 21) All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?" 22) Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ.

"Son of God"

appears in John's epistles 23x;

Paul's epistles 29x;

Peter's confession at Caesarea Phillipi 1x.

Because Saul was a skilled student of the great rabbi Gamaliel, and because he had letters of authority from Jerusalem, he could take advantage of the synagogue custom which invited any able Jewish man to speak on the scriptures at synagogue meetings.

The Jews in Damascus were amazed — but they weren't converted.

They were confounded, but not persuaded.

Write `Galatians 1:17' in the margin of this verse.

At this point, Paul, realizing the Jews were not receiving his testimony, took off for the desert where he would spend three years in Arabia.

Saul, a premier Old Testament scholar, enrolled in a three-year course taught by the Holy Spirit on how every symbol, every sacrifice, every picture in the Old Testament related to the Person of Jesus Christ., that He is the Son of God.

ESCAPING BY THE SKIN OF HIS TEETH

Acts 9:23-25

"After some time the Jews formed a plot to murder him; but Saul was informed of their plot. Night and day they kept continuous watch on the gates to murder him. But the disciples took him by night and, by way of the wall, let him down in a basket."

Luke says that after some time in Damascus these things happened.

The period dismissed in that passing phrase was no less than three years (Gal.1:18).

For three years Paul worked and preached in Damascus and the Jews were so determined to kill him that they even set a guard on the gates lest he should escape them.

"Gates" ordered to be guarded by the King (**2 Cor 11:32-33**).

2Co 11:32 In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me:

2Co 11:33 And through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands.

But the ancient cities were walled cities and the walls were often wide enough for a chariot to be driven round the top of them.

On these walls there were houses whose windows often projected over the walls.

In the dead of night Paul was taken into one of these houses, let down with ropes in a basket and so smuggled out of Damascus and set on his way to Jerusalem.

Paul is only at the gateway of his adventures for Christ but even here he is escaping with his life by the skin of his teeth.

Paul must have seen the great gathering against him in the synagogues. He knew what had happened to Stephen, he knew what he had intended to do to the Christians and he knew what could happen to him.

Clearly Christianity for him was not going to be easy but the whole tone of the incident shows to him who can read between the lines that Paul revelled in these dangers. They gave him a chance to demonstrate his new-found loyalty to that Master whom he had persecuted and whom now he loved.

Paul's preaching was so unanswerable that the Jews, helpless in debate, resorted to violence.

No one persecutes a man who is ineffective.

Counterfeit Christianity is always safe; real Christianity is always in peril.

To suffer persecution is to be paid the greatest of compliments because it is the certain proof that men think we really matter.

Escape from Damascus

23) After many days had gone by, the Jews conspired to kill him, 24) but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. 25) But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall.

Paul elaborates on what happened during the many days of verse 23

in Galatians chapter 1; relating how he went to Arabia for a period of time,

and then returned to Damascus and escapes

Then he went to Jerusalem;

the total of his times spent in Damascus and Arabia was three years.

At least two years of which he goes to Arabia (**Gal 1:15-18; 1 Cor 15:1-4**).

Galatians 1:15-18 But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, [16] To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: [17] Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. [18] Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days.

1 Cor. 15:1-4 Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; [2] By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. [3] For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; [4] And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:

The Sinai desert preparation was for both Moses and Elijah, and Paul also.

Paul insists that what he preaches he got directly from Jesus, not from Peter or the apostles. When? Probably in Arabia.

Jerusalem vs. Antioch: **Gal 4:25**.

Galatians 4:25 For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children.

then Paul returns to Tarsus.

(Later because of a new movement in Antioch, Barnabas goes to Tarsus to find him.)

REJECTED IN JERUSALEM

Acts 9:26-31

"When he arrived in Jerusalem he tried to make contact with the disciples. They were all afraid of him because they did not believe that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and told them the story of how, upon the road, he had seen the Lord and that he had spoken with him, and that in Damascus he had spoken boldly in the name of Jesus. He went in and out with them in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. He talked and debated with the Greek-speaking Jews but they tried to murder him. When the brethren got news of this they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus. So the Church all over Judaea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace as it was being built up; and, walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it was constantly increased."

When Paul arrived in Jerusalem he found himself regarded with the gravest suspicion.

It was there that he had made havoc of the Church and had dragged men and women to prison.

The Church owed Paul to the prayer of Stephen.

Then the Church owed Paul to the forgiving spirit of Ananias.

Now we see the Church owing Paul to the large-hearted charity of Barnabas.

When everyone else was steering clear of him, Barnabas took him by the hand and stood sponsor for him.

Barnabas showed himself to be a man who insisted on believing the best of others.

When others suspected Paul of being a spy, Barnabas insisted on believing that he was genuine.

The world is largely divided into those who think the best of others and those who think the worst;

and it is one of the curious facts of life that ordinarily we see our own reflection in others and make them what we believe them to be.

Paul himself said, "Love thinks no evil."

No one believed in men as Jesus did and it should be enough for the disciple that he be like his Lord.

Barnabas was a man who never held anyone's past against him.

Often because a man once made a mistake, he is forever condemned.

Once forgiven in Christ, God does not hold our past sins against us; and we should never condemn a man because once he failed.

Paul – as would become his pattern - disputed with the Greek-speaking Jews.

Stephen had been one of these Hellenists; and in all probability Paul went to the very synagogues where once he had opposed Stephen in order to witness to the fact that his life was changed.

Here again we see Paul in peril of his life.

For Paul life had become a thing of hairbreadth escapes.

Out of Jerusalem he was smuggled to Caesarea and thence to Tarsus.

He goes back to his native city again to tell them that he is a changed man and that the one who changed him is Jesus Christ.

Saul with the Christians at Jerusalem

26) When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. 27) But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. 28) So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. 29) He talked and debated with the Grecian Jews, but they tried to kill him. 30) When the brothers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

Thank God for people like Ananias and Barnabas, who welcome people into the family of God with simple friendship. As Paul would write later, love believes all things.

Barnabas: a Levite; a native of Cyprus (annexed as a Roman province, near coast of Cilicia where Saul was born. Both were Hellenistic Jews and eminent in their respective localities

In Galatians 1:18, Saul tells us that

in this first trip to Jerusalem, he stayed with Peter for fifteen days.

he never had an audience with all the apostles, seeing only Peter and James, Jesus' brother.

Saul faces opposition from the Jews; not the Romans

this will be a recurrent pattern in his ministry.

“Disputed” (only here and 6:9 in Acts) with Hellenistic Jews.

Saul picks up the ministry of Stephen, the very man to whose death he consented.

Twelve more years will pass in the life of Saul before he enters into prominent ministry, by being sent out as a missionary from the church at Antioch.

A Vision sends him away. Acts 22:17-21

Direct route: Sail from Caesarea N. To Cydnus, the harbor for Tarsus;

however, Gal 1:21: “came into regions of Syria and Cilicia”:

landed at Seleucia and

proceeded by land to Antioch,

then North to Cilicia, ending in Tarsus.

Summary statement

31) Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit; it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.

God's work through the church is not diminished, despite the great opposition that has come against it.

We are told nothing about the establishment of churches in Galilee;

Acts is really only a partial history of the church during this period.

When we are told that they had peace, it doesn't mean that all persecution had stopped, rather that they had peace in the midst of persecution.

At the end of verse 31, we are at an important historical crossroads in Acts and the events of the Roman Empire.

In 37 A.D., Caiaphas was replaced as high priest, first by Jonathan then by Theophilus.

In the same year, Tiberius, the Roman Emperor, was succeeded by Caligula - a man exceeding hostile to the Jews.

(He would be assassinated four years later.)

Emperor Caligula's persistent determination to have an image of himself set up in the Temple of Jerusalem caused strife for and among the Jews.

An influential Jewish deputation continually attempted to prevent this from happening.

Petronius, governor of Syria was ordered to make war on the Jews to force them to put the image of Caligula in the Temple.

Thousands implore him not to do this, offering their own lives.

Even Herod Agrippa, who was very influential at the time, intercedes, but probably ineffectually.

Caligula died before the orders were carried out or the measures would have succeeded.

This whole distraction between the Jews and Caligula over the image issue may have been part of why the church was a second priority for a while.

Edified has the idea of being built up; the churches were growing and being made strong.

Whenever God's people are walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, you may expect that they will be multiplied.

THE ACTS OF PETER

Acts 9:32-43

"In the course of a tour of the whole area, Peter came down to the saints who lived at Lydda. There he found a man called Aeneas who had been bed-ridden for eight years. He was paralysed. So Peter said to him, 'Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you. Rise and make your bed.' At once he stood up and all who lived at Lydda and at Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord. In Joppa there was a disciple called Tabitha--Dorcas is the translation of her name. She was full of good works and of deeds of charity which she never stopped doing. It happened that at that time she fell ill and died. They bathed her body and placed her in an upper room. Now Lydda is near Joppa and the disciples heard that Peter was there. So they sent two men to him to invite him, 'Do not fail to come to us.' Peter rose and went with them. When he had arrived they took him to the upper room. And all the widows stood by in tears, showing him the coats and tunics that Dorcas used to make when she was with them. Peter put them all out and knelt down and prayed. He turned to her body and said, 'Tabitha, rise.' She opened her eyes and she saw Peter and sat up. He gave her his hand and raised her to her feet. He called the saints and the widows and set her before them alive. This event became known throughout the whole of Joppa and many believed on the Lord; and Peter remained some time in Joppa, staying with a man Simon, a tanner."

This passage really follows Peter on from Ac.8:25.

When Peter healed Aeneas, he did not say, "I heal you"; he said, "Jesus Christ heals you."

Before he spoke to Tabitha--"Tabitha" is the Hebrew for a gazelle and "Dorcas" is the Greek for the same word--Peter prayed.

It was not his own power on which Peter called; it was the power of Jesus Christ.

We think too much of what we can do and too little of what Christ can do through us.

There is one very interesting word in this passage. Twice the Christians at Lydda are called saints (Ac.9:32,41).

The same word is used earlier in the chapter by Ananias to describe the Christians at Jerusalem (Ac.9:13).

This is the word that Paul always uses to describe the church member, for he always writes his letters to the saints that are at such and such a place.

The Greek word is "hagios"

It is sometimes translated "holy" but the root meaning of it is "different."

Basically the Christian is a man who is different from those who are merely people of the world.

"Hagios" was specially used of the people Israel.

They are specifically a holy people, a different people.

Their difference lay in the fact that of all nations God had chosen them to do his work.

The Christians became the people who are different, their difference lying in the fact that they were chosen for the special purposes of God.

So then we who are Christians are not different from others in that we are chosen for greater honour on this earth; we are different in that we are chosen for a greater service.

We are saved to serve.

Peter heals Aeneas at Lydda

32) As Peter traveled about the country, he went to visit the saints in Lydda. 33) There he found a man named Aeneas, a paralytic who had been bedridden for eight years. 34) "Aeneas," Peter said to him, "Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and take care of your mat." Immediately Aeneas got up. 35) All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

Peter's Ministry

From here to Chapter 12 is Peter's ministry. Paul's ministry is in Chapters 13-28.

The pattern of the apostles staying put in Jerusalem and those needing ministry coming from afar to them (as reflected in 5:16) is now shifting; Peter is going out from Jerusalem to do ministry.

Lydda: 12 miles Southeast of Joppa.

Believers - result of Philip's results (Acts 8:40).

Aeneas: no evidence that he was a believer, it was not his faith that made this happen.

Peter makes no mistake regarding who is doing the healing;

it is Jesus the Christ doing the healing, with Peter his instrument.

Jesus healed with the power of Jesus; but Peter did not heal with the power of Peter. Peter relied solely on the power of Jesus.

Dorcas from Joppa is raised from the dead

36) In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which, when translated, is Dorcas), who was always doing good and helping the poor. 37) About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. 38) Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, "Please come at once!"

39) Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them.

40) Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. 41) He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called the believers and the widows and presented her to them alive. 42) This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord.

Verses 32 and 41 mention the saints in Lydda and Joppa; this is the first time Christians are called saints in Acts.

The idea isn't of a super-perfect people; the idea is of a people who are different. Saints are set apart from the world at large; they are distinctive.

Joppa = modern Jaffa; 45 miles Southeast of Jerusalem; Jonah's seaport.

Tabitha - Syro-Chaldaic

Dorcas- Greek for antelope, gazelle

Sounds like she had the gift of helps; 1 Cor 12:28.

Why did Peter raise Dorcas from the dead?

There is no indication that anyone asked him to, and we can't say that it was Peter's custom to raise every dead believer that he saw.

It must have been a response to the direct leading of the Holy Spirit.

Does God still do this? Yes, He does; but Christians must not be gullible about unsubstantiated reports.

Peter seems to remember the healing Jesus performed in Mark 5:38-43, when He brought the daughter of the ruler of a synagogue back to life. In that healing, Jesus said, "Talitha cumi"; Peter says here "Tabitha cumi."

We should remind ourselves that Dorcas was not resurrected; she was resuscitated to her old life, where she would die again.

The fact that God raised Dorcas, yet Stephen (and later, James) remained dead reflects on His unknowable ways.

After all, it certainly seemed that Stephen and James were more important to the church than Dorcas; yet God knows what He is doing - even when we don't.

Peter did exactly what Jesus did to his mother-in-law.

Christ raised from the dead only on 3 occasions:

Jairus' daughter

Widow of Nain's son

Lazarus

Peter continuing the work of Christ as a member of the Body.

Peter stays with Simon, a tanner

43) Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon.

Association with anyone who worked with dead animals was strictly forbidden for an orthodox Jew.

A tanner had to live at least 75 feet outside a village because of his ritual uncleanness.

We begin to see Peter is less concerned about Jewish traditions and ceremonial notions; this lays groundwork for the following chapter.

First insight that Peter to some extent is overcoming prejudice, by his very willingness to stay with Simon the Tanner.