

***>>>>>> Acts - Lesson 17 <<<<<<<***

- 1) Last time, we began discussing Paul’s beginning years.
- 2) Continuing along those lines, let’s begin by looking at what happens immediately after his baptism in Damascus ...

**Acts 9:19b–25 (NIV)**

- 3) Saul goes immediately to the place he knows best – the synagogues.
- 4) And, what is his message at this point? – that Jesus is the Son of God.
- 5) Verse 22 tells us that he was proving that Jesus was the Messiah.
- 6) In this case, once the dots have been connected, it would seem to me to be an easy thing for a man of Saul’s knowledge and training in the prophecies of the Old Testament to prove his case.
- 7) Saul stays in Damascus for “many days” (undefined as to how long “many days” is).
- 8) In essence, there is a gap between vs. 22 and 23 which we need to fill in.
- 9) Now, we have to start filling in the missing pieces. To do this we start in Galatians 1:11.

**Galatians 1:11–17 (NASB 2020)**

<sup>11</sup> For I would have you know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel which was preached by me is not of human invention. <sup>12</sup> For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

<sup>13</sup> For you have heard of my former way of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it; <sup>14</sup> and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions. <sup>15</sup> But when He who had set me apart *even* from my mother’s womb and called *me* through His grace was pleased <sup>16</sup> to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, <sup>17</sup> nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those *who were* apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus.

- 1) There are a several things we must NOT miss here.
  - a) God revealed His Son to Saul so that he would be able to preach Him among the Gentiles.
    - i) We must ask ourselves a question at this point; What does “preach Him” mean?
    - ii) I think we can infer with reasonable certainty that is was NOT just to convince people Jesus was God’s Son – part of it – no doubt – all of it No!
    - iii) Paul preaches a Gospel and, he states clearly that it is NOT “of human invention”.
      - (1) Not from man.
      - (2) He was not “taught” it.

- 2) So, Jesus is gone – as we discussed earlier we can be assured that Paul was NOT a follower of Jesus while he was alive.
- 3) So, Paul has a need for knowledge – knowledge of what Jesus was all about.
- 4) He really only has one choice – go to Jerusalem and get with the men who had spent 3 years with Jesus and figure it out that way.
  - a) He tells the Galatians in vs. 12, that was not what he did – he “received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.”
- 5) Ok we have the how of the gospel he is preaching, what about the when and where?
- 6) As Paul occasionally does, he gets distracted for a moment telling them the reason he has to get this gospel – basically his Pharisaism.
- 7) But then he gets to the when and where

I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus.

- 8) Now, we might ask, why Arabia?
- 9) First, if you Google “where is Arabia in biblical times” you will see that there is considerable scholarly debate about where it was.
- 10) Paul, however, makes it quite clear where he thinks it is...

#### Galatians 4:24–25 (NASB 2020)

<sup>24</sup> This is speaking allegorically, for these *women* are two covenants: one *coming* from Mount Sinai giving birth to children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar. <sup>25</sup> Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is enslaved with her children.

- 11) Bottom line – Arabia is where mount Sinai is!
- 12) Now, as you might expect, there is a scholarly debate about where mount Sinai was as well.
- 13) IT DOES NOT MATTER!
- 14) Paul connects the two in his mind and whether we know where they are or not – HE DOES!
  - a) N.T. Wright compares this trip to that of Elijah to Mt Horeb (close to or perhaps another name for Mt. Sinai) after his victory over the prophets of Baal.
    - i) In this Elijah complains to God about his situation and is then told to return to Damascus.
    - ii) Wright’s idea is that Saul goes there with the idea of making that same connection.
    - iii) Saul’s zeal being tied to that of Phinehas and his need that of the equally zealous Elijah.
    - iv) Wright spends a considerable amount of time in his paper on the subject developing those arguments.
    - v) However, that refocusing of Saul’s zeal still does not explain sufficiently (in my opinion), how Paul came to his Gospel.

15) So, back to the why question.

- a) Another commentator, Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, suggests he went there to begin his mission to pagans or Gentiles.
- b) He further suggests that while there (for only a short time) he got crossways with the people and king of the area and was forced to return to Damascus.

16) However, if we look a little closer, perhaps even between the lines a little, we may see another possible explanation.

17) He went there for training by Jesus himself:

“received it (the gospel he has preached to the Galatians) through a revelation of Jesus Christ.”

**Looking at the Galatian passage, why do you think it seems so important to Paul to define clearly the source of his gospel?**

18) Now, please just bear with me for a minute and you can make up your own mind as to how plausible this may be.

- a) **Item 1** – Jesus has already told Ananias that He would be personally interfacing with Saul. **“I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”**
- b) **Item 2** – as I indicated earlier, Saul probably had little if any knowledge of the detailed teachings of Jesus. HE KNEW OF Jesus NOT Jesus.
- c) **Item 3** – he did not consult with any human being.
- d) **Item 4** – God has revealed His Son to Saul but we don't know what else at this point.
- e) **Item 5** – in the Galatian letter, Paul is defending his gospel as NOT coming from the ones who were apostles before him or from any human being.

19) Given all that, we cannot know how this revelation was made. However, there are some things we do know that may have bearing on this:

- a) We know that Jesus appeared to Paul personally. In 1 Corinthians 15:8 we read

<sup>8</sup>and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also.

- i) Paul here is speaking of the appearances of the “bodily resurrected” Jesus.
- ii) I don't believe this is the event on the Damascus road.
  - (1) There Jesus spoke to him but there is no indication that he actually saw Jesus.
  - (2) In fact, the first thing that happens is that he closes his eyes at the light that occurs – when he opens them he is blind.

20) I must hasten to add here that this theory does not negate in anyway the others I mentioned.

- a) He definitely could have felt the need to make the trek just to get his mind straight and talk with God as did Elijah.

- b) He absolutely could have and in any case probably did preach to the pagans of that country while there.
- i) That unto itself could have gotten him in trouble.

21) Obviously, Paul interfacing with and being taught by Jesus during this time is strictly my opinion and you can take it or leave it.

22) After Arabia, Saul is back in Damascus for the remainder of the “many days” Luke refers to.

23) He has been there long enough to make some folks very mad.

24) It is for sure that he was there long enough to convince at least some of the Jews in the community that he was also a threat and, like Jesus, needed to be eliminated!

25) Now picking up the story at Saul’s exit from Damascus.

- a) Obviously, a forced exit because of the hostilities and threats.

#### **Acts 9:23–25 (NIV)**

26) To get this in what I think is the correct sequence we have to listen to what Paul tells the Galatians once more.

#### **Galatians 1:18–19 (NASB 2020)**

<sup>18</sup> Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him for fifteen days. <sup>19</sup> But I did not see another one of the apostles except James, the Lord’s brother.

27) To my way of thinking, Paul is telling the Galatians where he went on leaving Damascus in a basket.

28) Back in acts, Luke, I think, completes and, lends a little more detail to, the story of Saul’s visit ...

#### **Acts 9:26–29 (NIV)**

29) Even though Saul stays with Peter for 15 days even Peter may have been suspicious along with the others.

30) So, along comes Barnabas to vouch for Saul and back up his story of the past 3 years.

31) Everything works out and he stays with them for a while – specifically with Peter for 15 days.

32) During this time, I think, again supposition on my part, that Saul, though he is moving around freely in Jerusalem and speaking boldly, he is not very effective because of the fear the local Christians have of him.

33) In Acts 22, I think Paul NOW relates more information about this situation:

#### **Acts 22:17–21 (NASB2020)**

<sup>17</sup> “It happened when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I fell into a trance, <sup>18</sup> and I saw Him saying to me, ‘**Hurry and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about Me.**’ <sup>19</sup> And I said, ‘Lord,

they themselves understand that in one synagogue after another I used to imprison and beat those who believed in You. <sup>20</sup> And when the blood of Your witness Stephen was being shed, I also was standing nearby and approving, and watching over the cloaks of those who were killing him.’ <sup>21</sup> And He said to me, ‘Go! For I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’ ”

34) I believe that when Paul says he returned to Jerusalem, he is speaking again of his initial return to Jerusalem from Damascus – some three years after heading to Damascus to arrest Christians.

35) We reach the end of this situation as we move back into chapter 9.

#### Acts 9:30–31 (NIV)

36) John MacArthur sums up the situation at this point like this:

With Saul the firebrand gone from the scene, both as the persecutor of the church and the chief target of the Christ-haters, things quieted down in Palestine. Luke again summarizes the progress of the church by stating that the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and, going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase<sup>4</sup>

37) From this point in the Acts chronicle, Saul is not mentioned again until the end of chapter 11 when Barnabas travels to Tarsus to find him.

38) To get a glimpse of what happens between now and that point, we have to continue with the rest of what he relates to the Galatians.

#### Galatians 1:21–2:2 (NASB2020)

<sup>21</sup> Then I went to Syria and Cilicia. <sup>22</sup> I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. <sup>23</sup> They only heard the report: “The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.” <sup>24</sup> And they praised God because of me.

**2** Then after an interval of fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also. <sup>2</sup> It was because of a revelation that I went up; and I submitted to them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but *I did so* in private to those who were of reputation, for fear that somehow I might be running, or had run, in vain.

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<sup>4</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., [Acts](#), vol. 1, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 278.

39) During this period (about 10 years), N.T. Wright believes that Saul was mostly in Tarsus.

40) His take is that Saul is grappling with what his true mission is and how to proceed.

41) Obviously, as we will see, he was also preaching and teaching during this period.