

Acts Part 1 Study Guide

Lesson 8: The Conversion of the Arch Enemy – Acts 9

1. The Conversion of Saul (Paul) – Acts 9:1-19

- A. In laying the groundwork for the ultimate direction of his narrative, Luke now includes his account of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus (“Paul” from here on). The importance of this event is documented by the significant role Paul has in establishing churches across the Empire, writing the majority of NT epistles and even by the repeated accounts of his conversion in Acts 22:3-21 and 26:12-18.
1. Paul is still intensely zealous in persecuting Christianity and is not content with the dispersion of disciples from Jerusalem. He embarks upon a program to hunt them down wherever they may be (9:1-3).
 2. Has any human undergone a greater shock to their consciousness than did Paul when Jesus identified Himself to him (9:4-9)? Paul had much to meditate upon during the three days in Damascus until Ananias came to him.
- B. How much time has elapsed since the scattering is difficult to determine, but secular history places Aretas in control of Damascus not earlier than AD 37. With the three-year span mentioned in Gal 1:18, together with some other chronological information, it is likely that Saul’s conversion occurs between AD 34-36. In this relatively short time since Pentecost, note that a strong disciple such as Ananias dwells in a foreign city and exercises considerable influence (Acts 9:10-16; 22:12).
1. Though reluctant (perhaps out of fear, and perhaps somewhat in the spirit of Jonah?!), Ananias complies with the Lord’s command to locate Paul, baptize him and clarify his mission to the Gentiles (cf. Acts 22:14-16).
 2. Paul’s conversion, though accompanied by certain miraculous activities, presents some interesting principles for consideration:
 - a. What evidence indicates that Paul was saved merely through excruciating guilt and unremitting prayer for three days?
 - b. To the contrary, what states that he was **not** saved until Ananias’ visit?
 - c. What is the **first** thing that Paul did once Ananias restored his sight?
 3. Since Ananias was not an apostle, and therefore could not convey miraculous gifts to anyone, how would you explain the phrase “*has sent me that you may ... be filled with the Holy Spirit*” (9:17)?

2. Paul's Post-Conversion Activities – Acts 9:20-30

A. This period is crucial as Paul's detractors will later accuse him of "hijacking" the apostleship from Peter. He will be portrayed as an interloper, a "Johnny-come-lately" who plagiarizes from the others and mixes in his own pro-Gentile slant.

1. But Paul "*immediately ... preached the Christ in the synagogues*" (9:20). It is not stated whether this was the result of a special endowment of the Holy Spirit or merely the fresh perspectives that had been brought to the OT prophets by the reality that Jesus was the Messiah. It is stated that "*Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews ...*" (9:22).

2. In any case, note the effect upon the Jews in Damascus (9:21):

B. Perhaps the phrase "*after many days were past*" (9:23) encompasses the three years Paul says he spent in Arabia *before* going to Jerusalem for the first time (cf. Galatians 1:17-18). Nevertheless, the hunter becomes the hunted and the disciples he once tried to imprison help him escape from Damascus (9:24-25).

C. What thoughts must have coursed through Paul's mind as he neared Jerusalem (9:26-30)! How he would look anew upon the hill of Calvary. How he would shudder at the memory of Stephen's murder and his role in it. And how apprehensive he must have been as he contemplated engaging his former Jewish allies in debate, knowing they would respond to him the way he himself responded to Stephen.

1. Explain how the brethren in Jerusalem reacted to Paul's desire for fellowship.

2. Who interceded for Paul and encouraged his acceptance?

3. How does the Jewish community react to Paul's preaching? Is fleeing always a mark of cowardice? Where does Paul go and why?

3. A Season of Peace and Prosperity – Acts 9:31-43

A. Reese, in his commentary *New Testament History – Acts*, attributes this period of prosperity to the Jews' distraction with the emperor Caligula, who commanded the governor of Syria to set up a statue of himself in the temple at Jerusalem. Thus preoccupied with the threat of Roman defilement, the Jews overlooked the activities of the Christians.

B. Luke now returns to Peter and tells of his role in the broadening of the kingdom to the Gentiles. In the meantime, Peter is fulfilling the command of Jesus to preach throughout Palestine first, and a brief account of his work in Lydda, Sharon and Joppa is given.