

The Book of Acts
Chapter 9:26-43 -- Part 2

Acts 9:31 Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.

I. Review

1. In our last lesson, we studied Acts 9:1-25 where we saw the conversion story of a pharisee named Saul of Tarsus. We found details of this story retold in Acts 22, Acts 26, and some details included in Paul's epistles.
2. While nearing the city of Damascus on a mission to persecute Christians in that city, Saul was blinded by a light when Jesus appeared to Saul.
3. Jesus told Saul that when Saul persecuted the church, it was persecuting Him, and him to go into the city to be instructed on what to do next.
4. At the same time, Jesus also appeared to and instructed a Christian in Damascus named Ananias. Reluctantly, Ananias agreed to minister to Saul, this one Jesus called a "chosen vessel."
5. The place of their meeting was in a house on Straight Street, which provided a straightening out to both men.
6. Ananias laid hands on Saul and he was healed of blindness, then he baptized Saul in Jesus' name, and Saul was filled with the Holy Ghost.
7. Saul then hung out with the believers in Damascus and began preaching Jesus in the synagogue. Those believers had been his target to arrest, and the synagogue had been his target location for arresting Jesus' followers.
8. Then when the Jews in authority, those whom he had been working for, devised a plan to kill Saul for going over to the dark side, the believers in Damascus helped Saul escape the city by lowering him in a basket over the city wall by night.
9. We ended with Saul spending roughly three years in the Arabian desert where he learned the full gospel from Jesus. That part we learned from Galatians 1.

II. Saul's three Years in Arabia (Verses 26- 31)

A. Saul receives the gospel from Jesus

1. Between verse 25 and verse 26, there is a gap of time not recorded here in Acts.
2. Verse 25 places him in Damascus and verse 26 places him in Jerusalem.

Acts 9:25-26

25 Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket.

26 And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.

3. However, we learn later in his letter of Galatians, that Saul did not go directly to Jerusalem from Damascus, but went into Arabia.
4. He was between Damascus and Arabia and back to Damascus for about three years. It was then and there he received the revelation of the gospel of grace directly from the Lord.

5. Then he returned to Damascus and then went on to Jerusalem, and then on to his home town of Tarsus.
 6. Let's read about that in Paul's letter to the Galatians that describes this period:
Gal 1:11-24
11 But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man.
*12 For I **neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.***
 7. Apparently, Jesus made more appearances to Saul than that brief appearance on the road to Damascus. We will read of that in verse 17 in a moment.
*13 For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it **[tried to destroy]:***
*14 And profited in the Jews' religion **[he was advancing in Judaism]** above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.*
*15 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:
 8. Paul felt that God had called him from birth, not because of who he was, but because of God's grace, to preach.
 9. And once again, like he said in verse 12, he didn't receive the gospel from flesh and blood, but by revelation from Jesus.
 10. He confirmed that before he saw the apostles in Jerusalem, he went into Arabia, or the Arabian Desert:
17 Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus.
 11. Just as God had called Moses to a desert place and revealed the law to him, Saul was called to a desert place to receive a revelation of grace.
*18 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him **fifteen days.***
19 But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother.
 12. We see he finally made it to Jerusalem. In a moment we will return to Acts 9:26 to see how the story continues. Continuing with Galatians 1:
20 Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not.
*21 Afterwards **[after 15 days in Jerusalem with Peter and James]** I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia **[Tarsus is in Cilicia, and Syria is just to the east, where Damascus is, where his journey started];***
22 And was unknown by face unto the churches of Judaea which were in Christ:
23 But they had heard only, That he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed.
24 And they glorified God in me.
 13. So Saul repeats that his time in Jerusalem was brief, and the churches there didn't know anything about him except that the persecutor was now preaching, and praised God for it.
- B. Reaction of Jerusalem

1. Although they glorified God for that fact, remember, the last time they saw Saul's face, it was likely bearing an evil grin as Stephen was being stoned. Now about three years later:
Acts 9:26 And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed [attempted] to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.
 2. Some were happy for him, but obviously some were still unsure of him.
 3. That's when the man Barnabas stepped up to defend Saul. We met Barnabas in Acts 4 when he had sold a piece of property and gave all the proceeds to the church to help the poor.
 4. Barnabas was not his real name, but his nickname, which means son of consolation, or "the encourager."
 5. So true to his nickname, Barnabas believed in Paul's sincerity and, as an encouragement to Saul, he encouraged the Apostles to receive him.
Acts 9:27-30
*27 But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how **he had seen the Lord** in the way, and that **he had spoken to him**, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.*
28 And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem.
 6. This is not the only time Barnabas was important to Saul's ministry. He returns in Acts 13 where he again helps Saul advance his ministry.
 7. After this intro, and still in the 15 days of his stay with Peter and James:
29 And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him.
 8. If you will remember, the first dispute in the church arose when there was a murmuring of the Grecians with claims of neglect.
 9. And also his former boss, the high priest was there. So just as he fled Damascus after a plot to kill him, now he flees Jerusalem and heads to...
30 Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus.
 10. Caesarea was a popular sea port on the Mediterranean Sea, so rather than taking him across land and a potential ambush, brothers took him by sea to his home in Tarsus. Do you see how important brothers are?
 11. **[map: Saul Flees Jerusalem to Tarsus-full; then south; then north]**
 12. Then there was a period of peace among the churches:
*31 Then had the **churches** rest throughout all **Judaea** and **Galilee** and **Samaria**, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.*
 13. **[map: map of Palestine in time of Christ—Judea, Samaria, Galilee]** When the persecution of the Christians died down, during this period of rest, the number of disciples was multiplied.
- III. Peter's Ministry at Lydda (Verses 32-35)
1. If you remember in our first lesson, we described the book of Acts as being roughly divided between the ministry of Peter in chapters 1-12, and the ministry of Paul in chapters 13-28.

2. So aside from seeing Saul briefly when Stephen was stoned in chapters 7-8, and his conversion in Acts 9, once Saul returns to his home in Tarsus, the focus of Acts returns to the ministry of Peter for the rest of chapter 9 and through chapter 12.
 3. The last time we followed Peter, he and John had ministered in Samaria where they had laid hands on Philip's converts and they had received the Holy Ghost, and then preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.
 4. Next, we find Peter went on an evangelistic tour through Judea and Samaria, which took place three or four years after we saw him last.
 5. By this time the gospel had spread through Palestine, so that there were churches scattered through Judea, Samaria, and Galilee as we just read in:
*Acts 9:31 Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, **were multiplied.***
 6. So the persecution did not reduce the church, it spread it out and multiplied it. So what should the church do when the persecution (or pandemic) ends? Party time? Lazy time? No, expand the ministry:
Acts 9:32-33
32 And it came to pass, as Peter passed throughout all quarters, he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda.
*33 And there he found a certain man named Aeneas, which had kept his bed **eight years**, and was sick of the palsy.*
 7. **[Map: Peter's Travels]**
 8. It is likely there was a church in Lydda. And his meeting with Aeneas may have reminded Peter of when he and John met the lame man at the temple gate in Jerusalem who had been lame over 40 years.
 9. So Peter prayed the prayer of faith for Aeneas.
Acts 9:34-35
34 And Peter said unto him, Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed. And he arose immediately.
35 And all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord.
 10. The healing of Aeneas not only brought relief from his suffering, and encouragement and comfort to all the disciples in Lydda, but it brought a stir and revival to all the people of Lydda, and the surrounding country of the Plain of Saron or Sharon. **[Map: Map of Palestine in time of Christ]**
 11. That is the name of the coastal plain between Joppa and Caesarea.
- IV. Peter's Ministry in Joppa (Verses 36-43)
- A. Who is Dorcas
 1. Word had spread to the nearby coastal city of Joppa, which was on the edge of the Plain of Sharon where Peter was traveling and ministering.
 2. The story line turns to a beloved saint of the church from Joppa whose name was Tabitha (Aramaic but Dorcas in Greek).

Acts 9:36-38

36 Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds **[acts of charity]** which she did.

37 And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died: whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber **[burial preparation]**.

38 And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa **[about 5 miles]**, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them.

3. I wonder about the saints' request to call Peter after Dorcas was already dead. We have no evidence that Peter had raised anyone from death before this event. The fact that they had washed the body indicates that someone was preparing her for burial.
 4. But they must have been familiar with the stories of Jesus who had raised Lazarus, Jairus' daughter, and the son of the widow of Nain.
 5. And of course, Peter had witnessed all those miracles, and Peter had prayed for many himself, and even his shadow brought faith for healing and casting out devils back in Jerusalem.
 6. But from the story, we don't read that they asked Peter to come because they wanted him to pray that she be raised from the dead, just that he would hurry and come to them. So he did:
Acts 9:39-40
39 Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them.
 7. When Peter arrived in Joppa, the weeping, grief-stricken widows showed him the garments Dorcas had made for the poor and needy.
 8. They not only mourned the loss of her presence, but also the loving and valuable service she had provided. And perhaps they hoped that the knowledge of her worthiness might influence Peter's prayer on her behalf.
 9. This scene reminds us of when Jairus' daughter had died with many mourners lining the pathway to the home.
- B. The prayer of faith
1. And just as Jesus had done, Peter sent everyone out. Grief and sorrow work in the opposite direction of faith:
40 But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up.
 2. She opened her eyes and sat up. He then took her by the hand, lifted her to her feet and presented her to the saints and friends she had served.
Acts 9:41-42
41 And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive.
42 And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord.
 3. What a joy and comfort that was to the friends and family, and throughout the region.
 4. Of course, those who have been raised from the dead, still have to die again, but God uses such miracles to turn the attention of many to believe in the Lord.

5. Because there is a better resurrection awaiting all who hope in Christ, which is the greatest comfort:
1 Thess 4:16-18
16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:
17 Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.
18 Wherefore comfort one another with these words.
6. Death is not defeat for God's saints but is rather the door to eternal victory:
Phil 1:21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.
7. The miracle of the raising of Dorcas was a testimony by which many came to believe in the Lord.
8. Peter remained in Joppa for some time, no doubt to preach the gospel and evangelize the city and surrounding country.
Acts 9:43 And it came to pass, that he tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner.
9. And as we will see next time, Peter being located in Joppa placed him in the crosshairs of one of God's greatest miracles. Or at least the miracle that has had the greatest impact on us—the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles.

V. Conclusion

1. Acts 9 is something of an intersecting point for what has been and what is to come.
2. We don't see it at the time, but it is a crossroads.
3. Up to this point, the church had been scattered assemblies of Jewish believers.
4. They had been brought up in synagogues learning the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms, and they were familiar with the God of the scriptures.
5. It was God's plan to use the Jews, Abraham's seed, to bless all the world.
6. So, now, the God of Abraham came into the world in flesh as Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, and offered Himself as a sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins, and then returned as the Comforter who would fill the believers with the Holy Ghost, which was simply the Spirit of Jesus, that one God of Abraham, now living inside of them.
7. That was a radical message which had been a mystery of the ages. But now the Jews had seen the complete truth—God's full plan had been revealed in the world.
8. But now it was about time to move the message to the world. So in this chapter, God saves a zealous Jew, Saul of Tarsus, who will eventually become the Apostle Paul, the missionary evangelist who will take the gospel to the Gentile world.
9. And also in this chapter, we see the setting of the scene where the Apostle Peter, the apostle with the keys to the kingdom, is put in the right place at the right time, just a few miles down the coast from where the first Gentiles will receive the gospel message in Caesarea.