

Jesus Builds – the book of Acts

Lesson Twelve | Acts 9:1-31

Background

The book of Acts was written by the physician, Luke, as a continuation of his Gospel. Jesus said he would build his church and Acts is the earliest history we have about that. It begins with the Ascension on Mount Olivet and then tracks the development of the early church with a particular focus on Peter in the early chapters and Paul in the later chapters, taking us to the early AD 60s.

Context

The martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 6-7) was the beginning of persecution that would push Christianity beyond Jerusalem. Acts 8 focuses on Philip's ministry to illustrate how the scattered Christians took the gospel where they went. This in turn fired up a young man named Saul, who was present at Stephen's murder, to hunt and persecute Christians. But Jesus has other plans for Saul.

Who is Saul / Paul?

To get a more complete biographical picture of Saul / Paul, we must compare the history in Acts to information in his epistles, especially Galatians.

The Ministry of Paul Introduced

1. **“Ministry” of Saul:** Saul the persecutor received letters from the high priest to synagogues in Damascus — essentially arrest warrants for Christians (**those in the Way**) there. (9:1-2; Gal. 1:13-14) This shows how rapidly Christianity spread beyond Judea and Samaria.
2. **Summer AD 35** — Saul converted. (9:3-7; also 22:6-10; 26:12-18). It is helpful to read all 3 accounts of his conversion. The persecutor becomes the persecuted and the missionary. What parallels can we draw from Paul's conversion and new purpose in life to our own?
3. **Saul in Damascus (9:8-22).** Saul made it to Damascus, but his mission changed. Ananias, who is only mentioned again in Acts 22:12, helped him regain his sight, get baptized and receive the Holy Spirit. Saul immediately began preaching that Jesus is the Son of God (9:20) and the Christ (9:22).
4. **Saul in Arabia (Gal. 1:11-12, 15-17) until early summer AD 38.** Saul's trip to Arabia is not mentioned in Acts and apparently occurred between Acts 9:22 and 9:23. What was Paul doing in Arabia?
5. **Saul in Damascus Again (9:23-25; Gal. 1:17; 2 Cor. 11:32-33).** When Paul returned from Arabia to Damascus and resumed preaching, non-believing Jews conspired to kill him, and he escaped the city in a basket lowered from a window.
6. **Saul in Jerusalem (9:26-29; Gal. 1:18-20) in summer AD 38.** Saul visited Jerusalem and stayed with Peter for 15 days and also met “James, the Lord's brother.” (Gal. 1:18-19) It is at this time that Saul met Barnabas (the son of encouragement). Paul preached to the Hellenistic Jews (9:29) and they sought to kill him, so he left town.
7. **Saul in Caesarea (9:30).**
8. **Saul in Tarsus (9:30; Gal. 1:21-24) in fall AD 38.** Up to this point, other than his short stay at Jerusalem, Saul had no ministry in Judea.
9. **Saul in Jerusalem Again (Acts 11:30; Gal. 2:1-10) in AD 43/44.** Saul did not return to Jerusalem again until, during the famine, Saul and Barnabas took aid to the church there.
10. **Peace Returned.** See the wonderful conclusion in Acts 9:31 with the church growing and experiencing peace.