

The Book of Acts: Verse-by-Verse

Study Notes: Acts 9:26-31

After a three-year period in Arabia, Saul decided to go to Jerusalem. Luke doesn't say what prompted him to do this, but Saul does in Galatians 2:2. He records, "I went there because God revealed to me that I should go." – Galatians 2:2

- **"He Tried To Join The Disciples":**

Luke says Saul "tried to join the disciples" - the general rank and file of Jesus' followers. Saul was hardly met with open arms by the rest of Jesus' disciples. The Greek uses the "imperfect" verb tense for "tried". It means s is called, "imperfect". This tells us that Saul kept trying to join the rest of the believers, but they weren't having it.

- **The Problem - Fear: v. 26**

"They were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple."

A familiar theme: 1st, in Damascus. Next, in Jerusalem. People just couldn't believe he had so suddenly switched from persecutor to preacher.

Three years before, Saul had used every trick in the book to deceive the believers in Jerusalem. See: Acts 26 – Saul's defense before Agrippa.

- **"The Son of Consolation": v. 27**

"But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles."

Luke's introduction of Barnabas: "Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet." – Acts 4:36-37

1. Barnabas' real name was Joseph. The apostles called him, "Barnabas" because he was one of those brothers who had a compassionate and caring personality.

2. Barnabas was a Levite:

God's first intention was that the entire group of Israelites would be a nation of priests. The Change in Numbers 3:12: "Now behold, I Myself have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of every firstborn who opens the womb among the children of Israel. Therefore the Levites shall be Mine" - Numbers 3:12

Israel's priests came from within the tribe of Levi: They were descendants of Aaron. All priests had to be Levites but not all Levites served as priests.

Barnabas, then, was a descendant of Levi, but not a priest.

3. Barnabas' home country: Cyprus - a large island in the Mediterranean Sea approximately 60 miles west of Syria and 50 miles south of Turkey. Cyprus was first named "Kypros" by the Greeks. It meant, "Land of the Cypress Trees".

(Saul and Barnabas' first missionary journey would be to Cyprus. They sailed from Syria to Salamis on the east end of Cyprus, where they preached in the synagogue there.)

- **Saul Meets The "Apostles":**

When Luke says the "apostles" he is using a generalizing term. Saul only met with two of them: Peter and James. See: Galatians 1:18-20.

Barnabas was well-known to the Jerusalem leaders. They loved this man's generosity and compassion so much, they changed his name from Joseph, which means, "to add to", to Barnabas, meaning, "son of encouragement".

Barnabas' Explains Saul's Conversion: v. 27

"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."

Saul's post-resurrection experience with Jesus was important. This was a requirement for Judas Iscariot's replacement. His attempts to preach the gospel in Damascus also carried weight: (proof of his willingness to expose himself to persecution).

- **Another Assassination Attempt: vv. 28-30:**

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."

Saul's account of his visit with Peter and James - Galatians 1:18-24: "Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days. I saw none of the other apostles—only James, the Lord's brother. I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie. Then I went to Syria and Cilicia. I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. They only heard the report: "The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." And they praised God because of me." – Galatians 1:18-24

"After three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas". Why does Paul call Peter, "Cephas" in the Galatians account?

In Galatians 1, Paul defends his role as an apostle. He emphasizes his teaching was not just gleaned from the other apostles. He makes it clear that he was not mentored by the other apostles but received his revelations from Christ over a period of three years.

When he describes his 15-day visit with Peter and James he uses the Aramaic form of Peter's nickname: Cephas. The name literally means a "stone". The original word is "Kefa", but it is transliterated to "Cephas".

Paul is emphasizing his visit to Peter because Peter was the chief of the apostles. Paul wanted to compare notes with Peter: See, Galatians 2:2.

- **The Grecian Jews Oppose Saul: vv. 28-30**

"So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. He talked and debated with the Grecian Jews, but they tried to kill him. When the brothers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus."

Note verse 29: "He talked and debated with the Grecian Jews, but they tried to kill him."

Luke is referring back to Acts 7: "Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people.⁹ Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)—Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia—who began to [debate] argue with Stephen." – Acts 7:8-9

Saul is debating with the "Grecian Jews" – the "Hellenists Jews" – the same people Stephen debated before his martyrdom!

- **The Assassination Plot:** "[The Grecian Jews] they tried to kill him. When the brothers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus."

This is the second time in a few years that some “God-fearing” Grecian Jews have tried to assassinate Saul. In Damascus, Saul’s friends had to lower him over a wall to safety. Now, his Jerusalem friends had to escort him to Caesarea, and send him home to Tarsus.

Caesarea Maritima:

In the Book of Acts there are several cities named “Caesarea”. Naming a new or rebuilt city after the Roman Emperor – “Caesar”, was a well-documented way of getting into his good graces!

Caesarea Maritima: A port on the coast of Samaria, dedicated by Herod the Great for Caesar Augustus. As we noted before, it was a man-made harbor – created specifically for larger ships that brought grain and merchandise from all over the first-century world.

Saul’s friends chose Caesarea Maritima because of its proximity to Jerusalem, and because it was an easy location from which to sail up the coast of Spain to Tarsus.

- **A Time Of Peace: v. 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.”

“With Saul out of reach, the apostles have a short break from persecution.” – unattributed.

As long as Saul was debating with the members of the “Synagogue of the Freeman”, he was invoking their wrath and creating issues for the Church.

- **The Churches or The Church: v. 31**

Luke uses the singular word for “Church” – “ekklesia”. He says the “Church” (singular) throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria had a

time of peace.

In almost all of his epistles, Paul will speak of the “churches” as he writes about various locales. See: Galatians 1:22; 1 Thessalonians 2:14.

By this point in the Church's history, it is no longer a homogenous Jewish/Christian fellowship as it was on the Day of Pentecost before the Spirit filled the 120 Galilean Jews. It now accommodated people from all over the known first-century world.

While the “Ecclesia” found its central administration in Jerusalem, as F. J. A. Hort notes, “It was no longer the Ecclesia of a single city.” Recognizing this, Luke refers to three representative districts: Judaea, Galilee, and Samaria.

With this expansion, Luke records, [The Church] was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.”

The “time of peace” the church in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria were experiencing is directly attributed to the work of the Holy Spirit. Notice what marked this season of peace: strengthening, encouragement, numerical increase, and a deep respect for Christ.

What an encouraging picture! Isn't that what every local church should pray for and seek to experience?

Luke has taken of much space in his narrative to tell Theophilus about Saul's conversion, but now he is ready to tell about the first real evangelism foray among the Gentiles – the story of Cornelius.

We will see that next time.