

Acts Chapter 9

This begins Paul's mission and runs for 7 chapters.

Saul's conversion is the most renowned conversion in Christendom. Saul is called and empowered to carry the word of God to the Jew first and especially to "God-fearing" Gentiles, like Cornelius.

Acts follows the lives of a succession of prophetic leaders. They face ever changing situations yet they always provide a solidarity of message and stability to community life and integrity to the witness.

We cannot forget Paul's deep and abiding connection to the Jewish people. He will proclaim good news to the Gentiles and pagan Gentiles as well, but he also preaches to those in the diaspora that are in synagogue where Moses is read every Sabbath.

Even when disagreements arise, the new community finds ways to support Paul and his mission to the nations.

Paul is self supporting. His tentmaker trade in Corinth symbolizes the sacred work that Amos prophesied – to repair and rebuild " the tent of David" .

Some will be hostile to Paul. For Paul he is always on to the next destination leading him to Rome, not Jerusalem.

Acts is placed before Paul's letters in the canon of Scripture because the early church needed an introduction to Paul's letters.

So begins the story of Saul- Paul

The literary importance and theological complexity of the Damascus road encounter with the risen Jesus is indicated by the fact that it is recounted three times, in Acts. Here at the beginning of Chapter 9 and again in chapters 22 and 26.

Acts is more concerned with Paul's call than his conversion. He is called to the others but also to the Jews.

Saul's zealous persecution of the church has taken him from Jerusalem to Damascus – he is seeking to continue his hostilities to anyone who belongs to Jesus' Way.

It is uncertain whether the high priest normally provided the kind of letters of authority that Paul sought.

It does suggest that people of Jesus' Way were devout Jewish believers. Some may have been Hellenists, but they had bound themselves to a synagogue

community and that made them susceptible to being bound by Jewish authority and subject to Jerusalem authority.

So, Saul is on his way to persecute the people of Jesus' Way.

He is breathing threats and murder against the faithful of Jesus.

He encounters the living Jesus. He is sure it is the living Jesus. (1 Cor 9: 1 15:8)

The sudden appearance of a light from heaven was brighter than the noon day sun. and it flashed around him. This is typical of when God meets a prophet

Exod 19:16; Ezek 1:4,7,13,28; Dan 10:6

Paul sees the exalted Jesus in the light

This epiphany is a divine presence and Saul hears a voice. This is the conversion experience. In Acts normally preaching is the conversion tool, but the voice of God commissions the prophets. Saul's use of the word Lord does not yet recognize Jesus but is an honest question of a devout Jew.

Saul is attentive – trusts he is encountering God and thus trusts when he is told I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.

God made Messiah alive and the living Jesus is speaking to Saul. Jesus is Christ indeed. Saul is faithful and trusts the one God. He has no choice as a devout Jew.

Jesus is to commission him for mission.

Jesus command is for him to go into the city and wait for instruction.

Sounds all very mission impossible to me.

(did I just date myself)

Saul was very powerful and now in the face of Jesus he is powerless. Christ is the power.

Witnesses do not see Jesus but hear him.

Saul is truly blindly obedient and he not only follows instruction but fasts (for 3 days). John 9: 25 he was blind but now he sees.

Saul sees a vision of what is to come with the help of Ananias, and Ananias hears from the Lord in a vision as well.

Ananias is rightly afraid of Saul. Yet he says yes Lord, here I am.

Apparently what Luke is trying emphasize is what a radical shift in Saul/Paul is happening in this encounter with Jesus. It is not important that Ananias hesitates, but that he trusts Jesus.

Paul is not called to bring Jesus' name to the Gentiles, kings and before the people of Israel.

The order Gentiles and kings before the people of Israel changes the focus of the mission from Jerusalem and the center of the Jewish nation to the hinterlands and the outsiders, this is a continuation of Philip's mission.

Paul's mission is truly international.

Paul will also witness to suffering – he must suffer, and it starts with blindness and helplessness. Paul goes from a powerful person in the temple to a blind convert.

Jesus suffered, Stephen suffered, the 12 suffer, Paul suffers. (attached at the end of this lesson is a listing of how the 12 suffered)

So in Paul's suffering he receives the Holy Spirit.

With his return to normalcy, Saul/Paul began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues.

There is an urgency to his message and mission. Somehow it seems the living Jesus has imparted enough knowledge to Paul that he is able to proclaim the good news of Jesus. (some have suggested he learned what people of Jesus Way were teaching in order to persecute them and that he begins to proclaim this knowledge as truth).

Saul/Paul is able to explain Jesus present in Scripture (we call this exegesis). His explanation confounds and amazes his opponents.

Guess what the Jews don't like this action on his part. Jesus is not God's Messiah for Paul and unrepentant Israel will protest. Paul uses the term Son of God for Jesus and it is his use alone in Acts. We hear it used in the Gospels and in Pauline letters too.

What a transition. He came to Damascus breath threats and murder and leaves afraid for his own life.

He heads back to Jerusalem. He attempts to connect with the 12. Can you guess why they would be leery?

But this also sets up a long term contentious relationship with Paul and the 12.

It takes the intervention of Barnabas, (who is known to have a generous spirit).
A period of tranquility settles on the church as Paul heads for Tarsus, his home.

Vvs 32ff

Acts has a way of weaving together different narrative strands of the church's mission. The stories of Peter and Paul are often woven together.

Peter is still one of the elite of the 12. Philip's mission leads the way for Paul, but Peter also has a hand in expanding the mission of the ministry outside Jerusalem.

Peter restores the paralytic Aeneas and Tabitha/Dorcas (gazelle). Peter is following in Philip's footsteps and is continuing signs and wonders and he is expanding his powerful abilities.

Peter does this in the name of Jesus.

Aeneas is a Greek name for a diaspora Jew. God's salvation is for all. All who witness the event turn to the Lord.

Tabitha/Dorcas is much loved in her community. Two witnesses of her death come for Peter. She is renowned for her good works and charity (a good person)

Peter helps her up and returns her to her friends.

Peter has ingratiated himself to the people and hangs out in Joppa for a while.

Just an aside to remember – Jonah departs for Nineveh from Joppa. Peter is not only connected to the Jonah story, but Peter is staying with a Tanner, Simon. A tanner would have been unclean for he worked with blood and animals. Peter is going to outsiders, hence offering his gravitas to the outsider mission.

- **Judas**

- Killed himself.

- **Andrew**

- According to Hippolytus:

- Andrew preached to the Scythians [modern day Georgia] and Thracians [modern day Bulgaria], and was **crucified**, suspended on an olive tree, at Patrae, a town of Achaia [Greece]; and there too he was buried.

- **Bartholomew**

- According to Hippolytus, Bartholomew preached in India:

Bartholomew, again, preached to the Indians, to whom he also gave the Gospel according to Matthew, and was **crucified** with his head downward, and was buried in Allatum, a town of the great Armenia [modern day southern Georgia].

- Eusebius, in his Church History, confirms the ministry of Bartholomew in India, and adds an eye witness account:

About that time, Pantaenus, a man highly distinguished for his learning, had charge of the school of the faithful in Alexandria... Pantaenus...is said to have gone to India. It is reported that among persons there who knew of Christ, he found the Gospel according to Matthew, which had anticipated his own arrival. For Bartholomew, one of the apostles, had preached to them, and left with them the writing of Matthew in the Hebrew language, which they had preserved till that time. ---- (Book 5, Chapter 10)

- **James, Son of Alphaeus**

- Hippolytus identifies that James was stoned to death in Jerusalem:

And James the son of Alphaeus, when preaching in Jerusalem, was **stoned to death** by the Jews, and was buried there beside the temple.

- **James, Son of Zebedee**

James was the brother of John, the disciple "that Jesus loved".

- According to the Book of Acts in the New Testament, James was killed by Herod:

Act 12:1 And at that time Herod the king threw on his hands to oppress some of those of the church.

Act 12:2 And he killed James the brother of John with the sword.

- This is confirmed by Hippolytus:

James, his brother, when preaching in Judea, **was cut off with the sword** by Herod the tetrarch, and was buried there.

- Eusebius described more precisely what was cut off of James:

First Stephen was stoned to death by them, and after him James, the son of Zebedee and the brother of John, was beheaded... (Book 3, Chapter 5)

- **John, brother of James and son of Zebedee**

John was one of the few disciples that did not die a cruel death, but of "old age".

- Eusebius discusses the reason that John wrote his Gospel:

"Matthew and John have left us written memorials, and they, tradition says, were led to write only under the pressure of necessity...And when Mark and Luke had already published their Gospels, they say that John, who had employed all his time in proclaiming the Gospel orally, finally proceeded to write for the following reason. The three Gospels already mentioned having come into the hands of all and into his own too, they say that he accepted them and bore witness to their truthfulness; but that **there was lacking in them an account of the deeds done by Christ at the beginning of his ministry.**" (Book 3, Chapter 24)

- According to Hippolytus, John was banished by Domitian to the Isle of Patmos, and later died in Ephesus:

John, again, in Asia, was banished by Domitian the king to the isle of Patmos, in which also he wrote his Gospel and saw the apocalyptic vision; and **in Trajan's time he fell asleep at Ephesus**, where his remains were sought for, but could not be found.

- **Matthew/Levi**

- Eusebius referenced to Bishop Papias of Hierapolis, as early as c. 110 A.D., bearing witness to Matthew's authorship of his gospel:

...Matthew put together the oracles [of the Lord] in the Hebrew language, and each one interpreted them as best he could." (Eusebius, Book 3, Chapter 39)

According to Hippolytus:

Matthew wrote the Gospel in the Hebrew tongue, and published it at Jerusalem, and **fell asleep** at Hierrees, a town of Parthia.\224 [Parthia is near modern day Tehran]

- **Simon/Peter**

- Eusebius, quoting Papias of Hierapolis (c. 110 A.D.), records a tradition that the Gospel of Mark preserved the Gospel as preached by Peter:

"Mark having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately whatsoever he remembered.... he accompanied Peter..." ---- (Book 3, Chapter 39)

- Irenaeus (c. 180 A.D.) records a similar tradition, and mentions that Peter and Paul founded the Church in Rome:

"Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect, while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome, and laying the foundations of the Church. After their departure, Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, did also hand down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter..." ---- (Irenaeus, "Against Heresies", Book 3, Chapter 1)

- Eusebius records that Peter was put to death under Nero in Rome:

It is, therefore, recorded that **Paul was beheaded in Rome** itself, and that **Peter likewise was crucified under Nero**. This account of Peter and Paul is substantiated by the fact that their names are preserved in the cemeteries of that place even to the present day. ---- (Book 2, Chapter 25)

(Paul was a Roman citizen and cannot be crucified but got an "easier" death sentence)

- Hippolytus confirmed the fact that Peter was crucified by Nero in Rome:

Peter preached the Gospel in Pontus, and Galatia, and Cappadocia, and Betania, and Italy, and Asia, and **was afterwards crucified by Nero in Rome with his head downward, as he had himself desired to suffer in that manner.**

- **Philip**

- According to Hippolytus, Philip preached and was executed in what today is eastern Turkey:

Philip preached in Phrygia, and **was crucified** in Hierapolis with his head downward in the time of Domitian, and was buried there.

- **Simon the Zealot**

- According to Hippolytus, Simon the Zealot was the second Bishop of Jerusalem:

Simon the Zealot, the son of Clopas, who is also called Jude, became bishop of Jerusalem after James the Just, and fell asleep and **was buried there at the age of 120 years.**

- **Thaddaeus/Judas son of James**

According to Mat 10:3 (KJV): Philip, and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the publican; James the son of Alphaeus, and **Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus....** Thaddaeus is also known as Lebbaeus.

- Hippolytus records:

Jude, who is also called Lebbaeus, preached to the people of Edessa, and to all Mesopotamia, and **fell asleep** at Berytus, and was buried there.

- **Thomas**

- Hippolytus records that Thomas was an active missionary, and that he met his fate in India:

And Thomas preached to the Parthians, Medes, Persians, Hyrcanians, Bactrians, and Margians, and **was thrust through in the four members of his body with a pine spear** at Calamene, the city of India, and was buried there.

- **After thought**

- Many of Jesus disciples died cruel deaths for preaching the gospel
- From other sources (e.g., Paul's letters, Pliny's letters to Trajan etc), all these Christians need to do to escape a cruel execution was simply: to denounce their faith in Jesus...

Meanwhile, in the case of those who were denounced to me as Christians, I have observed the following procedure: I interrogated these as to whether they were Christians; those who confessed I interrogated a second and a third time, threatening them with punishment; those who persisted I ordered executed. For I had no doubt that, whatever the nature of their creed, stubbornness and inflexible obstinacy surely deserve to be punished. There were others possessed of the same folly; but because they were Roman citizens, I signed an order for them to be transferred to Rome.

(A letter from Pliny to Trajan)

- Yet, they decided not to denounce Jesus... Why ???...
- People do not die for a lie - these disciples must have seen something that made them choose their cruel death over denouncing their faith.
- Remember that these disciples are Jews - and the ultimate promise of God to the Jews was the coming of a Messiah....

- Maybe, just maybe, they were convinced of having seen and touched the Messiah ? The resurrection of the dead may have given them the necessary push that made them overcome their doubt ?
- Human nature is such that no **sane** man would give up his own life to a belief that he knows is untrue.
- If anyone knew **for sure** whether Jesus did or did not resurrect from His death, it would be His disciples.
- The **historical FACT** that many of these disciples decided to give up their own life to tell the world about that "Jesus has resurrected" is a very **STRONG evidence** that what they died for is ***the truth*** !
- The reason that many of these disciples were executed is this:

They refuse to renounce their Lord Jesus, the Christ... That is the **truth** they are willing to die for...