

### Timing of Events

#### Acts 9

There is disagreement as to when exactly Saul was converted. Many assume it was on the road to Damascus by the witness of Jesus Christ. Others say it was through the testimony of Ananias, by the prompting of God. The first is often said to be true in mid-Acts circles because Saul would then have then been saved by hearing the Gospel of Grace coming directly from Jesus Christ. Those who say it was under Ananias' testimony point to Saul needing time to absorb what Jesus Christ told him while traveling to Damascus, and seeing a correspondence between Saul's spiritual insight and the physical restoration of his eyesight. Either way, we know Saul was saved to be the ambassador to the Gentiles, which was God's response to Israel stoning His prophet Stephen. Israel stumbled when they crucified Jesus Christ, and fell when they rejected the testimony of the Holy Spirit through Stephen. Israel's program is now being put on the back burner while God begins to deal with the Gentiles through the Apostle Paul.

#### Timeline

It is often helpful to take a look at the timing of these events in Acts. Too often we get the sense that these events happened over a period of months when in reality they cover a period of approximately 35 years. Jesus had been actively ministering on earth with His Disciples for approximately three years. Israel was given an additional year after Jesus' ministry to repent and turn to Him as their Messiah (Luke 13:6—9). These events are covered up through Acts 7. This leads up to the raising up of the apostle Paul.

Following Stephen's death, the offer of the soon to come Millennial Kingdom was now off the table. God began preparations to begin a new dispensation through Paul. Immediately after Stephen was stoned, Saul began to intensely persecute the Little Flock of believers to stamp out anything to do with Jesus. During this time of persecution, most believers left Jerusalem to find safety. The only ones who are specifically said to have remained headquartered in Jerusalem were the 12 Apostles (Acts 8:1—4, 14). Saul gave chase to the saints who fled Jerusalem by hunting them down in Damascus and beyond (Acts 9:21). Acts 8 covers perhaps a year or so of when Saul was persecuting the believers.

Following his conversion, Saul stayed with the disciples in Damascus for certain days (Acts 9:19). Although not explicitly stated, these certain days would be a shorter time than the many days of verse 23. It would appear that the many days includes the three years of Saul going down to Arabia. While Saul was staying with the disciples in Damascus, he would go to the synagogues and confound them by boldly preaching and proving that Jesus Christ was the Messiah (Acts 9:20—22).

Galatians 1 gives some details that are missing from the accounts in Acts. Galatians 1:17 says that Saul did not go into to Jerusalem to speak with the Apostles of the Hebrew church, but that he went onto Arabia and then back to Damascus. After three years, he went onto Jerusalem to see the Apostle Peter (Galatians 1:18). Some believe Saul stayed in Arabia for three years and then at the end of the three years he went back to Damascus and then to Jerusalem. Traveling from Arabia to Damascus and then back to Jerusalem does not quite make sense. If he wanted to visit with Peter, he would have stopped in Jerusalem before going farther north to Damascus. Jerusalem and Damascus are approximately 135 miles apart. It would appear that the three years (Galatians 1:18) includes his time in Arabia and Damascus.

After this three year period, the Jews were trying to figure out how to kill Saul. However, Saul had heard about their plot and the disciples in Damascus let him down in a basket over the city wall to escape their murderous attempts (Acts 9:23—25). He then headed to Jerusalem and attempted to join himself with the disciples there. They wanted nothing to do with him because they still feared him, until Barnabas took him personally to the apostles and told them how he was preaching Jesus Christ in the synagogues at Damascus. Saul's preaching in Jerusalem irritated the Grecian Jews so now they desired to kill him. At this point the Jewish brethren brought him to safety in Caesarea and then up into Tarsus, Saul's home town (Acts 9:30; Galatians 1:21).

The 14 years mentioned in Galatians 2:1 is either the total time from his conversion, or it is in addition to the three years mentioned in Galatians 1:18. From Saul's conversion to his meeting with the leadership of the Hebrew church in Jerusalem is about 14 years so it would appear that those two time periods should not be added together. It is approximately one year later when Paul and Barnabas go out together with the message of Grace.

### **Why to Arabia?**

It seems odd, and perhaps a bit out of place, for Saul to mention that after he was saved that he went down to Arabia. Arabia is a large area covering from Damascus to the North and to the South well down the Red Sea. Within the borders of Arabia is Mt. Sinai where Moses received the Law from God (Galatians 4:24—25). You might recall that Moses spent 40 days and 40 nights with God as He gave Moses the Law.

Saul mentioned going to Arabia without explaining why. We can perhaps surmise that as God began a new dispensation for Israel under Moses, He was now beginning the dispensation of Grace through the Apostle Paul by appearing to him to instruct him in the Mystery. As God delivered the Law to Moses, He was now delivering the beginnings of the Mystery doctrine to Saul. That may mean that Saul was in Arabia for only 40 days and then traveled back to Damascus. That is just conjecture since there is no concrete proof of that, but the parallel seems to make a lot of sense. Whether Saul was there for 40 days or even as long as three years, this marks the first time God began to reveal the Mystery doctrine to Saul. Remember, Saul did not receive this doctrine from any man, but received it by revelation from God (Galatians 1:1, 11—12).

### **Saul's influence**

It is amazing how influential one person can be. One man, Saul, initiated the persecution of thousands of believers causing most of them to flee out of Jerusalem. One result of that is that the Gospel of the Kingdom was spread beyond Jerusalem. The salvation of one man also had great ramifications as persecution suddenly stopped, and the churches throughout Judea, Samaria and Galilee finally had rest. As a result of that, the churches grew (Acts 9:31).

Following the events of Saul's conversion and early ministry, Scripture now turns to Peter and his activities during this same time. God not only needed to raise up a new apostle to deliver His new message to the world, but He also needed to inform the 12 Apostles and the Hebrew church that there were changes coming. Peter is the head Apostle and so it seems quite appropriate for God to work through him in getting out the word of a change. These changes are highlighted in chapters 10 and 11 in the book of Acts.

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