



Acts Chapter 9 Continued Part 2

As we finish our study on the 9th chapter of the book of Acts, there are a few things that are important to remember before we move forward.

First of all chapter 9 opens with Paul being a violent persecutor of those following “The Way”, and by the end of chapter 9 this same Paul has been awakened from his blindness and is now on the same side as those who were known as followers of “The Way”.

And as we've noted several times in the last couple of weeks.. one thing that is also very important to remember is that no Gentiles have been mentioned in the last 9 chapters of the book of Acts up until now.

Another important fact to remember is the reason that these different Jewish factions were trying to kill the Apostles. Why did the Pharisees and the Temple authorities want them dead? Their Messiah was dead and gone as far as they were concerned, so if he was no longer a threat to them.. then why go after his Apostles?

The reason they wanted to kill the Apostles was because these Apostles and those who believed, and began to pick up their crosses and follow after the Messiah were now challenging the Temple authorities “Halakhah”.

And if we remember correctly the “Halakhah” was the man made, man fabricated, man created law that they had added to Gods Torah. And this was the foundation of their man made, man created, man fabricated hybrid religious system that Yahshua hated so much.

And it's important to remember that even to this day there are heated debates and violence going on in Israel over “Halakhah” and the different factions of Judaism that still exist even as we speak. Many of these Jewish factions are still fighting amongst themselves just like we Christians are fighting amongst ourselves between our thousands of different denominational charters of men who are all teaching and preaching something just a little different.

Men of power do not like other men who are supposed to be under their power.. to question their authority. And there is no difference between modern day Judaism and modern day Christianity in that respect.

It's important for us to understand that much of what we will find in the book of Acts and elsewhere in the scripture is still going on today in our modern day culture.

As I've said many times.. when we read through these scriptures.. much of what we read is like looking through a mirror. Much of what we see is nothing more than a reflection of our own culture and the same stumbling blocks that they were stumbling over in Yahshua's time.. are the same stumbling blocks that we're stumbling over in our time.

Remember what Paul said in our study of the book of Romans? Lets revisit that scripture very quickly

Rom 9:30 What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith;

Rom 9:31 but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law.

Rom 9:32 Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone,

Rom 9:33 as it is written, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."

And yet.. even to this day.. the very same stumbling stone still causes men over 2000 years later to stumble, and to fall.

Ananias Heals Paul

Moving forward in verse 10 we're introduced to Ananias who was a disciple in Damascus, and he's sent to Paul to lay hands on Paul and heal his blindness and to welcome him into the discipleship.. but Ananias was reluctant to do as Yahshua asked him to do because he knew that Paul was a ruthless persecutor of those who were Yahshua's followers.

Never the less.. Yahshua tells him that Paul is going to be his agent to carry his name before the Gentiles and the kings, and the children of Israel.

Now I want us to notice that in verse 15 Yahshua does not say that Paul is going to be an Apostle to the Gentiles only. Yahshua says that he will carry his name before the "Gentiles, and the kings, and the children of Israel".

We often hear people calling Paul the Apostle of the Gentiles and while he did bring many Gentiles to the truth of the Messiah.. and he does refer to himself as such in Romans 11:13.. he did not only preach to the Gentiles and we'll see that in subsequent chapters as we move

forward.

But I do want us to think about this for just a moment. How many times have we seen someone wake up and finally believe.. but because we've always known that this person was a bad apple.. we too have doubts about their true salvation much like Ananias had about Paul?

This is a normal and I might add.. a healthy skepticism that we should all have when someone turns from their wicked lifestyle and decides to follow after the Messiah and become part of the body of the Messiah.

We need to protect the body, and we are told to test the fruits of every man who calls himself brother. The scripture says that we will know them by their fruits.

A new believer needs to be nurtured and handled with care as he or she grows into the faith, but once again we need to remember that no one who believes continues to go on sinning.

1Jn 3:4 Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.

1Jn 3:5 You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin.

1Jn 3:6 No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him.

1Jn 3:7 Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous.

1Jn 3:8 Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.

1Jn 3:9 No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God.

1Jn 3:10 By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

So it wasn't that Ananias thought that he was smarter than his Messiah when he questioned bringing Paul into the discipleship of believers.. it was simply that Ananias wanted to be sure that this ruthless persecutor of the Messiah's followers was not a wolf in sheep's clothing.

And of course once he heard from his Messiah, that it was okay, and that his Messiah had some very specific plans for Paul.. Ananias was then sure that it was indeed okay to do as his Messiah was asking him to do.

But how many times, are we Christians today ready to follow after every wind of doctrine that comes out of the mouth of a man with out question? How many times have we seen this?

To many Christians today are all too willing to simply follow after whatever wind of doctrine is being taught at any given time without ever testing that doctrine in order to see whether it stands up to the scripture or not.

So let us remember how important it is to not only know our scripture, but to also know how to understand our scripture so that no man will ever be able to lead us astray.

I can not tell you how many Christians that I have met that can recite, and regurgitate whole chapters of the Bible.. but have no understanding of the scriptures that they so eloquently recite.

Remember this my friends.. even a bird can recite scripture. It does not take a rocket scientist to recite something that he read or heard somewhere. Any bird brain can do that.

But it is those who understand the scripture.. that are truly anointed by God. And you can only get that discernment from him. It does not come from any man.

Now with that being said.. it's important to understand that even when Paul was rounding up followers of "The Way" to bring them back to Jerusalem to be persecuted.. he was only doing it because he truly believed that this is what God wanted him to do.

Paul was himself a Pharisee, and even calls himself a "Pharisee of Pharisees". Paul was at the head of his class, and well known throughout the synagogues, as someone who was zealous for the things of God.

So it should not surprise us then.. that when he realized that Yahshua was indeed his Messiah.. Paul went right back into many of those same synagogues with the same zeal for Yahshua his Messiah.

Paul was an extremist my friends.. and by today's measure.. he would surely have been put on the Department of Homeland Security's "Terrorist Watch List".

Paul was an extremist in every way speaking and teaching boldly wherever he went and he was not afraid to mix it up with these congregations who had been taught the man made, man created, man fabricated religious system of Judaism's "Halakhah".

Make no mistake about it.. Paul and the Apostles all walked with their heads up and their shoulders pulled back everywhere they went boldly proclaiming the Gospel message of their Messiah.

The Missing Link:

Something else very peculiar that we see in Acts chapter 9 is that we are told that Paul stayed in Damascus for an extended time once he became a believer.

Then we're told that once Paul hears that there is a plan to kill him.. some local disciples help to lower him down from an upstairs window in a basket so that he could escape Damascus. The next thing we're told in verse 26 is that he went to Jerusalem.

Now.. there is a small discrepancy that we see here in Acts chapter 9 verses what Paul tells us in his letter to the Galatians in the first chapter of Galatians.

Acts 9 says he arrived in Damascus as a new Believer, escaped Damascus and then went to Jerusalem. But In Galatians chapter 1.. Paul says that after he left Damascus, he first went to Arabia and afterwards went back to Damascus, and then he went to Jerusalem. And there are other discrepancy's that we see between Acts chapter 9 and Paul account in Galatians as well but I want to first focus on this timeline for a moment.

Here's what Paul tells us is his own account of the timeline between his becoming a believer and the time he went to Jerusalem:

Gal 1:15 But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace,

Gal 1:16 was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone;

Gal 1:17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.

Gal 1:18 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days.

Gal 1:19 But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother.

Now I want us to notice that according to Paul's own account he says that after Yahshua makes himself known to Paul.. Paul says that he left Damascus and then went to Arabia, and then he returned again to Damascus.

After he returns to Damascus Paul says “then after 3 years I went up to Jerusalem”.

Now how long Paul was in Arabia we're simply are not told. And what was Paul doing in Arabia.. we are not told, but he does say that once he returned to Damascus.. three years after that.. he went up to Jerusalem to visit Peter and he says he stayed with Peter for 15 days.

And Paul goes on to say that he did not see any of the other Apostles other than James the brother of Yahshua. And this leads us into the next discrepancy.

Acts chapter 9 verse 26 says:

Act 9:26 And when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple.

Act 9:27 But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus.

So here we see a totally different account of what went on during Paul's stay in Jerusalem according to his account in Galatians.

If we simply read Acts chapter 9 we're lead to believe that the time Paul left Damascus and went to Jerusalem was just a few days or weeks.. but in reality according to Paul's own account it was more than 3 years between the time that Paul left Damascus that he went to Jerusalem.

Now I want us to keep in mind that there are all kinds of Bible commentators and biblical scholars out there who are all to ready to explain why Paul went to Arabia, and how long they think he stayed there and what went on during that time period.. but to be sure.. let us be clear.. this is all speculation.

The truth according to scripture is that we simply do not know why Paul went to Arabia, or how long he spent there. All we know is that he did and then when he returned to Damascus we're told that 3 years later he went to Jerusalem. And that's all we know according to what the scripture says.

So we find some different facts between what we read in Acts chapter 9 and what we read in Galatians chapter 1. And so we have to ask ourselves how this can be?

It's pretty clear to me that some of Luke's account in the book of Acts came from second hand information. We have to remember that Luke was not always an eye witness to everything. Some of what he writes about are things that he witnessed with his own eyes and some of the things he writes about he simply got from other witnesses.

Luke writes in a broad sense about the travels of Paul in chapter 9 but when we get to Galatians we find a more detailed and accurate account that comes directly from Paul himself.

So this should not through us.. but at the same time we need to be clear about what it does and does not say about Paul's trip to Arabia so that others can not ad their speculation into what really happened.. and the truth is.. according to the scripture.. we're simply not told why Paul went to Arabia.. how much time he spent there.. or what his purpose was for going there in the first place.

Now let me say this.. there is nothing wrong with speculating what he may have been doing in Arabia.. speculation only becomes a problem when it's taken as gospel. We need to remember what is scriptural and what is speculation, and simply keep these things in mind.

I will say this much.. Moses spent years in the desert of Midian before leading the people of Israel out from the bondage of Egypt under Pharaoh, and Elijia also wandered in the desert before he came forth to do his work trying to save Israel from the bondage of Baal.

And we also see even John the Baptist who wandered in the desert before coming forth to do his work preparing the way for his Messiah.

So the idea that Paul went into the desert of Arabia should be of no surprise when we look back and see that this was often the case for those about to do Gods work.

So lets stop here and think about this for a moment. Paul is really in a bind at this point in time. The Pharisees who sent him after the followers of “The Way” are not happy with him because he now has become part of “The Way” and as far as the Temple authorities are concerned Paul is a traitor.

And the Apostles don't trust him because they know that he was one of the most fierce persecutors of the followers of the Messiah. So Paul really is between a rock and a hard place at this point in time. Most of the Apostles were afraid to even associate with him for fear that he may be a plant, or a decoy sent to trap them.

But Paul continues in his faith, and as we will soon see.. he finally does prove out his faith, even though his teaching and preaching style is much, much different from the other Apostles.

We have to remember.. that the other Apostles were blue collar workers.. they were fishermen and tax collectors and carpenters, but Paul was the only true academic in the group. So it should not be hard for us to understand that Paul's teaching style would be much different than the other Apostles style of teaching.

We have to remember that Paul was a Pharisee of Pharisees, he was at the top of his class, and once again a very educated man that came from a very Jewish family who were very well placed in the community. So Paul would have had a lot of experiences with the upper elite in his culture, but not so much with the lower class.

And there were several differences in the way that Paul taught and the way that the other Apostles taught, for instance lets take a look at a couple of things that the other Apostles had said about Paul's teaching style.

Here's what Peter had to say about the teachings and writings of Paul:

2Pe 3:15 And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him,

2Pe 3:16 as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.

2Pe 3:17 You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability.

So Peter obviously felt that the writings of Paul were difficult to understand because of his style of teaching. In fact Peter was so worried about Paul's style of teaching that warns us not to let "lawless people" lead us astray.

So Peter knew that many people would think that Paul was teaching against the laws of God and would take him the wrong way, and this is why he gives us the warning not to be lead astray by lawless people.

And so with that.. I'd like us to also take a look at what James the brother of Yahshua had to say about Paul's style of teaching.

Act 21:18 On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present.

Act 21:19 After greeting them, he related one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.

Act 21:20 And when they heard it, they glorified God. And they said to him, "You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed. They are all zealous for the law,

Act 21:21 and they have been told about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or walk according to our customs.

Act 21:22 What then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come.

Act 21:23 Do therefore what we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow;

Act 21:24 take these men and purify yourself along with them and pay their expenses, so that they may shave their heads. Thus all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself also live in observance of the law.

So clearly James and the elders at Jerusalem were no doubt confounded with Paul's teaching style as well, and we can also see that many of the Jews who were zealous for the law and knew Gods law were also perplexed by Paul's teachings, and many of them thought that Paul was teaching against the law of God and they thought that Paul was trying to tell them not to circumcise their children and that he was teaching them to forsake Moses.

So James and the elders tell Paul to take these four men who were under a Nezerite vow down to the Temple and to pay for their expenses so that they could shave their heads, and so that everyone would know that Paul himself always lived in observance of the law.

And Paul did as James and the elders told him too. So once again.. here we have Paul going to the Temple and making these sacrifices with these men to show that he was keeping the law so that there would be no more confusion on the matter.

Now I want us to understand that Paul was not making sacrifices for sin. There are other reasons that God commands sacrifices other than for sin. When one comes out of a Nezerite vow there are sacrifices to be made and a mans head is to be shaved, and none of this was inexpensive by the way. These things took a good amount of money to acquire.

For more information on what a Nezerite vow is.. you can read Numbers chapter 6 verses 1 through 21.

And yet still.. after what is written concerning Paul according to James and the elders who clearly state that Paul always kept, and walked with in the precepts of Gods law.. I would submit to you my friends that many a biblical scholar today will still proclaim that Paul preached against the law of God and told people that it was okay to not be circumcised. None of which is true according to the scripture.

Paul nor any of the Apostles ever taught against the law of God or circumcision any where in the scripture. The problem is that to many people don't understand the writings of the Apostle Paul and they do twist the writings of Paul to their own destruction as they do the other scriptures.. just as Peter tells us in 2nd Peter 3:16.

Once again my friends Paul never teaches anyone not to be circumcise anywhere in the scripture. He simply teaches that being circumcised alone dose not save anyone. We are not circumcised or baptized for that matter in order to “be saved”. We circumcise and baptize because we are saved and this is the love of God.

1Jn 5:3 For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.

1Jn 2:3 And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments.

1Jn 2:4 Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him,

1Jn 2:5 but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him:

1Jn 2:6 whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

So... now lets get back to why Luke did not tell us that Paul went to Arabia.

And why does Luke tell us in the book of Acts that Paul went to see all the Apostles in Acts chapter 9 verse 26 and that they were all afraid of him.. when Paul himself tells us in Galatians 1:19 that he only met with James the brother of Yahshua and none of the other Apostles were there?

Many a biblical scholars have pondered this question for years but for me.. this only proves the biblical narrative.

These men were flesh and bone human beings. Luke was doing his best to give the very best account that he could for what had happened. Some of the time we know that Luke was with Paul and had seen things first hand, but when Luke was not with Paul he had to rely on 2nd had accounts and information.

It's not so hard to understand that Luke did his best to record Paul's history the best he could. We all often times tell things a little differently for example.. I might say that I went to dinner last night.. but if you ask my daughter she might say that I went to the "Ponderosa" and I got a salad, and a coke, with honey mustard dressing, and then I came home and went to bed.

So we both said the same thing really.. the point was that I went to eat. The details were simply more evident in how my daughter told the story than how I told the story.

But these are some things that we as Christians ought to be aware of so that we're not fed a bunch of nonsense from someone who likes to fill in the blanks with speculation and assumptions rather than to simply tell the story as it was written.

When we get to Heaven we can ask Paul why he went to Arabia, and how long he was there, and he'll tell us, but until then.. we simply do not know for sure, and anything more is simply speculation.

THE HELLENISTS

Moving forward we read in Acts chapter 9 verse 29 that Paul spoke out against the Hellenists and that these Hellenists were seeking to kill him.

Remember that the Hellenists were different from the Hebrew Jews. The Hebrew Jews spoke mostly Aramaic and Hebrew while the Hellenist Jews spoke mostly Greek, and were Jews from the Dispersion, who came back to settle in Jerusalem.

And this is why the brothers brought him down to Caesarea and set him on his way back to

Tarsus where Paul was originally from. And of course what better place to launch your ministry from. At home in Tarsus Paul would have had many connections and he would have known many people there who could have helped him prepare for his journey.

PETER RAISES DORCUS FROM THE DEAD

Then in verse 32 the story turns back to Peter who heals Aeneas who had been paralyzed and bedridden for the last eight years. Lydda is located in Samaria, so once again we have Peter who is performing miracles in Samaria just as Philip had been doing. So Yahshua clearly was not overlooking the Samaritans the way that the Jerusalem Jews had done.

Then in Acts 9 verses 36 through 42 we see Peter once again raising Dorcas from the dead.

This is certainly not the first time we read of someone being brought back from the dead. Elijah did it, Elisha did it, and of course we know that Yahshua also raised Lazarus from the dead, but once again we can clearly see the power that was given to the Apostles to do things that only those anointed by the had of Yahovah God could do.

THE CONCLUSION

There's a lot to learn from Acts chapter 9 but one of the most important things to remember here is that God chooses just the right people to accomplish his mission.

Paul had no idea that even from birth he was being groomed for Apostleship, and to carry the Gospel message of his Messiah to the nations, and so it is with each of us.

No matter what your background, no matter where you're from, no matter how rich or poor you are, the scripture is full of people from all walks of life being used by God to bring forth his purpose, and to complete his mission.

So what I'm trying to say is.. don't be surprised if you're knocked off your horse on the way to Damascus one day. That's how it works for most of us.

Philippians 2:12 through 15 tells us this:

Php 2:12 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,

Php 2:13 for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Php 2:14 Do all things without grumbling or disputing,

Php 2:15 that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the

midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,