

Saul has just been called by God, converted by the Holy Spirit and eternally saved. He has spent time with the disciples of Damascus and has gone out to begin testifying to what the Lord Jesus Christ has done in him. Quite naturally, being a brilliant Pharisee with an intimate knowledge and understanding of all the Old Testament Scriptures from Moses' five Books through Malachi, his first constraint would be to begin telling all this good news to every Jew, everywhere; after all, now that it's all so clear to Saul, other Jews, surely, would be able to understand the wisdom of all Saul had to say and teach but, as every teacher knows, there are always those who refuse to be taught, who refuse to change their minds concerning the things of which they are certain but the thing which Saul will have soon begun to understand is that it wasn't his intelligence, wisdom or learning which opened his heart and mind to the Truth but, rather, it was only God's Love, Grace and Mercy in having chosen Saul, for Himself, from the foundation of the World. Not only will many Jews refuse to hear what Saul has learned but they will actually want to murder him, *just as they had done with his Savior, some months before.*

**Verse 22:** *'But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ. <sup>23</sup> And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him: <sup>24</sup> But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him.'*

As Saul convincingly laid out the Truth of the Lord Jesus Christ's clear and obvious fulfillment of so many prophecies proving His identity as the long awaited Messiah, it would not have taken long for him to see the confounded Jews' growing frustration and rejection of him, and of the Lord Jesus Christ. He would have recognized the murderous hatred in their voices and in their eyes. Other disciples would have observed that some of the hate-filled Jews were hiding in shadows or behind rocks and bushes at the gates of the city, laying in wait for the opportunity to seize Saul and to kill him.

**Verse 25:** *'Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket. <sup>26</sup> And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.'*

The Jews were watching the gates in order to catch Saul on his way out of Damascus; they planned to murder him but God protected him by having the disciples lower him down over the wall in a basket. Next, we see him in Jerusalem, 150 miles to the South. The news of Saul's conversion had not yet reached the disciples in Jerusalem so they feared him; they remembered his past viciousness, his breathing out threatenings and slaughter, that he had been last seen in Jerusalem entering the homes of Christians and hauling them off to prison; no one believed in him or trusted him, quite naturally so.

The Jews' plan for Saul was murder but God's plan for Saul/Paul was far larger with eternal consequences but His plan for Saul was not unique. Remember that Paul will write, of God: *'...For there is no respecter of persons with God.'* Rom 2:11

God's plan for Paul did not, in essence, differ from His plans for you or me; His plans for us are the same as His plan for Paul in that we are only called and equipped to accomplish what He has called and equipped us to do... nothing more and nothing less. Look at Ananias, who had laid his hands on Saul; he was called and equipped to do a relatively small thing and yet, what he faithfully did will echo throughout eternity. The thief on the Cross was only called and equipped to do one small act of faith but what he did has echoed throughout the millennia of the Church Age, proving to one and all that God's gift of Salvation is freely offered but only accomplished as the gift of God through His gift of faith to every believer. We are called and equipped to share the Gospel; we are called and equipped to pray for others; we are called and equipped to love each other... granted, sometimes that can seem the hardest ministry of all... but we can do it! The Lord Jesus Christ can do it through us.

Paul's main mission was to brilliantly write and preach most of our Doctrine for the True Church; you or I could not have done that but God had prepared him to do just that. Firstly, he was surely some kind of Genius but even more, he was trained from childhood in all the Law and Prophets, possibly having committed it all to memory. Then, he was taken up into Heaven to be taught, by the Lord Jesus Christ, all his understanding of the Mysteries which God has placed in His Word and what would reveal and define our New Covenant of His Grace. God has not equipped any of us in that dramatic fashion so we are not expected to do what Paul did but we are

expected to fully utilize the gifts, abilities and trainings God has placed in us. We are called to be faithful in what God puts before us: no matter how small and seemingly insignificant: *'His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.'* Matt 25:23 ... *'And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.'* Matt 10:42

The importance of reading and studying The Acts of The Apostles is twofold: first, to better understand the birth and early growth of the True Church, the chosen and called out Body and Bride of the Lord Jesus Christ and secondly, to learn more about the 11 Apostles' growth from simple fishermen, following and learning from God's Son during His Earthly Ministry, to their later formation as the pillars of the True Church, which is laid upon the sure foundation of the Lord Jesus Christ. Then, they would be inspired to write down His Word for the True Church as it spread throughout the Mediterranean Basin and eventually throughout the World; and, even more than all the other Apostles, Acts shows us the evolution of Saul, the Christ-hater, into Paul, the Christ-lover and faithful scribe of the Holy Spirit's Words of Life to every child of God who would follow after.

But right now, Saul is an outsider, all around; the Pharisees no longer want anything to do with him; the Jews want to kill him; the Christians are afraid of him and the Apostles seem to be sitting back and just watching...

**Verse 27:** *'But Barnabas...*

We remember Bar-nab'as... that's really his last name: son of Nab'as; his first name is Joses or Joseph; his name means, 'son of rest,' and that's what he is, now, to Saul... a friend, a supporter, a companion. He was the one who first sold a piece of property and brought the price to the Apostles which then inspired Ananias and Sapphira to sort of do the same but then end up dying in the process for their duplicity toward the Holy Spirit. Barnabas' act of faithfulness toward the Lord's Work brought him into the 'inner circle' of Church leadership and, so, he is able to take Saul right to the Apostles, introduce him and confirm his story while speaking up in his defense.

**Verse 27:** *'But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.'*

This will be the beginning of an important ministry partnership between Saul/Paul and Barnabas.

In these few verses, we have a gap of time which is not clearly delineated... Luke is giving a broad overview of the life of the Church's first 30 years. Obviously many, many things had to have been left out and many gaps of time remain but everything which God wanted us to know has been preserved for us completely.

Paul writes: *'But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. <sup>12</sup> For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ... But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, <sup>16</sup> To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; **immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood:** <sup>17</sup> **Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me;** but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. <sup>18</sup> Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days. <sup>19</sup> But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother. <sup>20</sup> Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not. <sup>21</sup> Afterwards I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia; <sup>22</sup> And was unknown by face unto the churches of Judaea which were in Christ: <sup>23</sup> But they had heard only, That he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed. <sup>24</sup> And they glorified God in me.'* Gal 1:11

Paul is saying, 'I didn't receive my Gospel from the other Apostles; no one taught me; what I preach was given to me directly from the Lord Jesus Christ, Himself, when He took me up into Heaven after my miraculous conversion; I spent 3 years preaching the Gospel, which the Lord had given me, in and around Damascus and the surrounding countryside as well as out in the desert areas.'

The Word seems to indicate that he began to preach as soon as he was able and never stopped.

It seems that Barnabas took Paul up to Jerusalem after these three years but even then, it would not be for another 14 years until there was a complete understanding of the Gospel of Grace in the other Apostles.

It's also important to understand that Paul wasn't made an apostle by the decision and vote of the first apostles; he received his apostleship directly from the Lord Jesus Christ and it was many years before there was a clear

understanding between the others and Paul regarding the full Gospel of Grace which had been committed to Paul. The other 11 would have questioned Paul's Apostleship; when they chose Matthew to replace Judas, they determined that an Apostle should have been with them all during Jesus' Ministry which Paul had not.

It's quite possible that this may have been a source of some friction; Paul never becomes 'one of the guys;' he's always an outsider, the one specifically tasked with taking the Gospel to the Gentiles.

Paul writes: *'Then **fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with me also.** <sup>2</sup> And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain. <sup>3</sup> But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised: <sup>4</sup> And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: <sup>5</sup> To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you. <sup>6</sup> **But of these who seemed to be somewhat, (whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me: God accepteth no man's person:) for they who seemed to be somewhat in conference added nothing to me:** <sup>7</sup> But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter; <sup>8</sup> (For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:)' <sup>9</sup> And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, (finally) they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision... **But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed.** <sup>12</sup> For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. <sup>13</sup> And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. <sup>14</sup> But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? <sup>15</sup> We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, <sup>16</sup> Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified...' Gal. 2 We see that here that Paul is not at all impressed with Peter who seems weak... 'fearing the Jewish disciples from Jerusalem' this doesn't sound like the powerful, confident leader Peter proved himself to be at the first...*

Here, perhaps, we see some of Paul's pride leaching through: 'they added nothing to me; they seemed to be pillars' but God had given Paul that thorn in the flesh to bring him back to humility.

Paul was bold, forthright and always ready to preach the Gospel while never worried about impressing anyone and never fearing anyone at all!

**Verse 28:** *'And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem. <sup>29</sup> And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him.'*

Paul is the one who disputed against the Grecians, confounded the Jews, he seems to have had the courage and knowledge to be right up in their faces whereas the other Apostles had spent their early lives being wary of Jewish rulers, Pharisees, Sadducees and Chief Priests. Paul is in awe of no one and we did see real courage, previously, in Peter and Stephen.

And now, this is after that 3-year time in and around Damascus; now he is spending some time in Jerusalem while continuing to preach the Gospel and to convince and dispute the Jews of Judea as well as Greek speaking Jews. What a life! Seems like today: certain groups of people... if they disagree with you, they want to kill you! If you refuse to agree with them... you are worthy of death!

**Verse 30:** *'... but (the Grecians) went about to slay him. <sup>30</sup> Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus.'*

Luke says 'down to Caesarea' but map-wise, it's about 86 miles north. Then, from Caesarea to Tarsus, southern Turkey is about 550 miles which would have been by ship.

**Verse 31:** *'Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and*

*walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.'*

The churches had rest and multiplied; God gave them about 30 years of relative peace in which to grow strong and multiply but that would all end in AD 64, after the Great Fire, when Nero began the Great Persecution which would continue for nearly 300 years until Constantine created Catholicism, the combination of 'christianity' and paganism; eventually, Catholicism and the popes would become the most vicious slaughterers of True Christians the World has ever known; eventually, Islam would try to outdo Catholicism in that regard.

Here we see that Luke has really omitted much; there was great persecution; everyone was scattered; all the Jews want to kill Paul who returns to Tarsus and suddenly... all is well.

The Holy Spirit simply lays out the framework while withholding so much history; historical facts during the time of the Church are not what's most important; Solomon said: *'One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever. <sup>5</sup> The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose... <sup>6</sup> The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits... <sup>9</sup> The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and **there is no new thing under the sun.**'* Ecc 1:4

The Old Testament gives much history, the history of a people, the people of God whose nation, land and kingdom will endure forever; Israel are the Earthly People of God; they embrace their history and their future Kingdom, under Messiah, on that one piece of ground which they love above all else, the same piece of ground that is loved by God.

We, on the other hand, the True Church, the Body and Bride of the Lord Jesus Christ... we are the Heavenly People of God: our citizenship is in Heaven *'For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: <sup>21</sup> Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.'* Philp 3:20

*'The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.'* John 3:8 We have been born of the Spirit; for us, Earthly history is far less significant; we are commanded to: *'Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.'* Col 3:2

*'Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. <sup>16</sup> For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. <sup>17</sup> And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.'* 1John 2:15

Paul writes: *'... this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, <sup>14</sup> I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.'* Philps 3:13 *'Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)' <sup>6</sup> And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: <sup>7</sup> That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.'* Eph 2:5

We are given some history of the development of the Apostles' ministry but primarily as the foundation for the Gospel; but the Gospel, Itself: that is what's most important: God's revelation of Himself in the Lord Jesus Christ and His careful explanation of Salvation. Man is sinful, God, Who is Holy, is also full of Love, Grace and Mercy and He is the One Who has reached down to us to create our only Way, Truth and Eternal Life, the Lord Jesus Christ. Old Testament history is crucial as it all points to the Lord Jesus Christ; New Testament 'history' is only given as the foundation of the Gospel and the True Church and, so, it is sketchy and spotty but we do learn all which God intends for us to know.

We, now, are like the Israelites traveling through the desert wilderness; their wanderings were only 40 years; ours have been 2000 years; they were led by the pillars of cloud and fire; we are led by the Holy Spirit; we travel through the kingdom of darkness, shining out as lights in the darkness, beckoning all to come to the light of the Glorious Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, our only hope of Salvation.