

Acts 03-12-19b

Let's resume our study now in Acts chapter 9. We're looking at some of the other places where Paul describes his experiences subsequent to the Damascus Road and the recovery of his sight and these intervening years that are skipped over relatively quickly in Luke. And I mentioned that when Paul says in Galatians 1:17 that he went to Arabia for some period of time, possibly measuring years. He was in Damascus, Arabia and Damascus for a three-year period.

I pointed out on the break that one of the things that makes me suspect that perhaps he went to Mount Sinai is that in that same book when you go over to Galatians chapter 5 and look down around verse 24-25 where he's using the example of Hagar and her son versus Sarah and her son to talk about the son of the bondwoman and the son of the free woman, he mentions the word Arabia once again and he specifically says that Mount Sinai is located in Arabia which is slightly unusual. It's a fairly well-known mountain. It wouldn't necessarily be a requirement to specify where it is located.

But when he says Mount Sinai which is in Arabia and just a few chapters earlier he says that he himself was in Arabia, you have to wonder if maybe being in Arabia he would not have made a trip to that mountain. And if so, for what reason? Did he seek out the mountain perhaps realizing as he grew in his understanding that there was going to be a change in dispensation similar to that that took place beginning with the burning bush and Moses' experience there. Is there a possibility that God spoke to Paul in Arabia as he did to Moses? I suppose anything is possible.

There's no hint of it in the Word of God except for the fact that Paul very specifically says that he spent time right after his awakening to the identity of Christ and his first preaching opportunities he went to Arabia and I ask myself why would he go there if not for a spiritually motivated purpose. Having said that I want to also point out that in talking about the time spent there and then coming back to Damascus in Acts 9:23-25, the Jews plotted together to do away with him. When he's let down from the wall in a basket this would obviously be his second stay in Damascus rather than the first because if he's let down from the wall in a basket then he's not going to be coming back with any kind of a warm welcome.

So their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night so that they might put him to death. His disciples took him by night and led him down through the wall lowering him in a basket.

Sort of an ignominious way to leave the town. He starts out with thunder and lightning and all kinds of power preaching opening the synagogues but he has to kind of leave surreptitiously shall we say. And you wonder about the Jews plotting together to do away with him and of course this threat on his life he is now very quickly on the other side of the equation from where he was just shortly before where he had been the persecutor and the persecuted were running and he is now getting a full taste of his own medicine and there is something of an irony there.

But their plot became known to Saul and we have to think that this was divinely appointed that he would become aware of this and be able to escape it but you notice that there is not a supernatural divine intervention here. He has to make his own escape and you find this quite often in the career of the Apostles and of Paul in particular that he becomes aware of a danger and he has to take steps. He is not delivered away from beatings.

He is not delivered away from shipwrecks. In fact if you want to return with me to Galatians let's just take note because many believe that what he speaks of here at the end of chapter 4 and 5 probably took place during this 14 year period. The different experiences that he has had I'm looking for it here.

This is what I get for changing Bibles. I should never study in one and read from another. We saw the 14 year period there right at the intersection of chapter 1 and chapter 2 and I think what we're looking for is in 2 Corinthians chapter 11 verse 32 and 33 we have another reference to this exit from Damascus and we get a little bit of additional information there where he says in Damascus the Ethnarch under Aretas the king was guarding the city of the Damascenes in order to seize me and I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and so escaped his hands and this indicates that the Jews in Damascus were powerful enough to involve the government in much the same way that the Pharisees in Jerusalem involved the Roman government and were able to get sort of governmental authority and governmental involvement in seeking to arrest and execute the Apostle Paul because the Ethnarch of the city has his official troops and so on in this effort so what we have is a period of time in Paul's life where there doesn't seem to be a lot of victory there doesn't seem to be a lot of accomplishment there seems to be sort of an ignominious departure from Damascus and what he then says is that he did not go to Jerusalem so we have to conclude that the Jerusalem trip of which Luke speaks in chapter 9 is subsequent to all of these events so back in Acts chapter 9 the story picks up in verse 26 after the disciples took him by night and led him down through the wall in a large basket it says when Saul had come to Jerusalem he tried to join the disciples but they were all afraid of him and did not believe that he was a disciple and Barnabas takes him and brings him to the Apostles but it would appear that when it says the Apostles this is not all 11 or 12 counting Matthias this evidently is only Peter and then James the half-brother of the Lord he declared to them how he'd seen the Lord on the road he had spoken to him he had been preaching boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus and he was with them at Jerusalem coming in and going out and he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists but they attempted to kill him so the Jews in Damascus are trying to kill him and now the Hellenists in Jerusalem attempted to kill him now what does this bring to mind how about Acts chapter 7 and Stephen who is it that succeeded in getting Stephen stoned and killed it was the Hellenists in Jerusalem and Saul was standing there holding their coats while they did so these same individuals now are seeking to kill Saul so once again quite an irony that his former compatriots have turned on him with the same vituperation that they directed against Stephen when the brethren found out they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus.

Tarsus is in the region of Cilicia C-I-L-I-C-I-A if you look at your Bible map like we did on the break you see that that is the region up in the north eastern corner of the Mediterranean up around Antioch and over Tarsus is between Antioch and Lystra and that whole region in there is where Saul went and it would appear that this is then the 14 year period that he says he spent in Syria and Cilicia so the episode there from verse 26 through 30 is the 15 days spoken of over in Galatians chapter 1 notice in verse 31 then all the churches throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified walking in the spirit of the Lord comfort of the Holy Spirit they were multiplied Saul was such a big part of the prosecution effort and when he defected and left nobody really stepped in and took his place and so the churches had peace there no one stepped in and picked up the torch for persecution and arrests and so on that Saul had been carrying for whatever reason so the churches throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified so there is a period of rest and recuperation and freedom from persecution where they are allowed to flourish and be edified walking in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit and they multiplied so this is the snapshot we have of the Apostle Paul intruding into our narrative here so to speak because we still have a largely Jerusalem centered account that Luke is giving us but this is placed in its chronological order and so Paul has come and gone basically and for the next 14 years he's going to be sort of out of sight and out of mind from a central Israel perspective so we return now in verse 32 to looking at Peter it came to pass as Peter went through all parts of the country that he came down to the Saints who dwelt in Lydda this community still exists today in Israel it's north and a little west of Jerusalem in fact this is where Israel's international airport is located today is in a town called Lod L-O-D but this is the ancient Lydda that is spoken of here so he's not far from Jerusalem there he found a certain man named Aeneas who had been bedridden eight years and was paralyzed Peter said to him Aeneas Jesus the Christ heals you arise and make your bed then he arose immediately so all who dwelt at Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord what I think is significant about this is that Peter is still fully in the midst of the commission that was given him by the Lord Jesus Jerusalem Judea Lod or Lydda is in the northernmost area of Judea but this is still where Peter and the other apostles are functioning they have not gone to Damascus they have not gone to other areas outside it's interesting that Paul's striking down and his initial impact even among the Jews is outside the land of Israel and I wanted to follow up a little bit on that in Galatians I know I have you kind of going back and forth but look with me one more time in Galatians chapter 1 because when Paul begins in verse 11 making known that the gospel which was preached was not according to man he says I neither received it from man nor was I taught it came through revelation of Jesus Christ you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism I persecuted the church I advanced in Judaism beyond my contemporaries exceedingly zealous when it pleased God and look at verse 15 when it pleased God who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through his grace we've had some discussion in connection with the chosen vessel study of looking at the idea of predestination or for ordination or God positioning people in history and in time and in circumstances and within families or nations or whatever because of his foreknowledge of the nature of our choosing and the nature of our motivation to faith and so on

so it would seem that this is a confirmation of that idea because Paul says here he was separated from birth this is how this verse is commonly understood and commonly interpreted that he says God sort of separated me for service from birth so to speak from my mother's womb and called me through his grace in order to reveal his son in me that I might preach him among the Gentiles well I just wanted to offer a little bit of insight into this passage because in Galatians 1.15 here when Paul says he is the one that separated me the word that's used there is aphorizo a-p-h-o-r-i-z-o or d-z-o aphorizo we get the word aphorism from this aphorizo is a very interesting word its root meaning is to separate to set apart to take away it is used in Matthew 25.32 for the sheep and goats judgment all the nations will be gathered before him and he will separate them from one another aphorizo has the idea that things are together and in contact and they are divided and taken away from one another so much so that the lexicon defines aphorizo as the removing of one party from other parties so as to discourage or eliminate contact to separate or take away it is used in Acts 19.9 for Paul himself separating some disciples there were individuals to whom he was trying to speak the gospel in Acts 19 Paul goes into the synagogue and speaks out boldly for three months reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God but when some were becoming hardened and disobedient speaking evil of the way before the people he withdrew from them and separated the disciples reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus and so he these that were in contact he took them away and out of contact with this antagonistic element so that he could teach them and there is of course a great principle of separation in the word of God that there is a time to separate and to eliminate contact with those who are antagonistic and that's what aphorizo means is of course used here in Galatians we find it also in Acts chapter 13 and verse 2 while Saul and Barnabas are ministering to the Lord and fasting the Holy Spirit says set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them split them off take them out of contact with yourselves and send them off to do this mission this work to which they have been called so the reason I think this is important is that if Paul was talking about a setting apart for service it would probably be hagiadzo the sanctify I was set apart in the sense of sanctification from my mother's womb but he uses aphorizo here and says he was separated from his mother's womb and what he's talking about is the separation that takes place at birth there's nothing that's more intimately connected than a woman and her unborn child that's as intimate a connection as you can have between two human beings and at the point of birth he was separated from his mother's womb and so if you read the statement he says it pleased God the God who separated me from my mother's womb he is the one that brought me into existence in other words he is the one that brought me into this world the same God that had me be born that separated me and so the idea here the separation that is in view is the separation of the baby from the mother's womb he isn't being separated unto service and you see what I'm trying to get across here this is not a theological statement he separated me to the ministry of the gospel because Paul was not set apart at the point of his birth from anything except his mother's womb now having said that look at this closely he doesn't say this in this way without purpose and under the inspirational ministry of God the Holy Spirit it is said this way because in the same way that Saul was intimately connected with his mother but in order to come into the world and begin the road to his purpose

he had to be separated from his mother in the same way Paul the Apostle is going to have to be separated from his Judaistic roots from his Pharisee clan and clique and in other words I think he is using this as a picture he says the same God that separated me from my mother's womb I was so closely identified with that and it was a strong bond of love but God separated me from my mother's womb and when he called me by his grace to reveal his son in me this is another separation like unto the one that happened at his birth and so his strong attachment and his roots in Judaism and in Phariseeism and in Israel there is a separation and that's why you have aphorizo that's going to be used in chapter 13 of his separation along with Barnabas for service to go to the Gentiles and you see this even in his calling God does not confront him Jesus does not speak to him until he's outside the nation of Israel why didn't God strike him in Jerusalem why not two hours after Stephen was stoned it's symbolic there's there's significance in the fact that he is outside the land when Jesus confronts him his initial training and contact and fellowship with believers is in Damascus not in Jerusalem even though 95% of all the people who know anything about Christ and the new revelation of things everything that's happened since Pentecost they're all in Jerusalem but there's this small cadre of believers in Damascus and that's where God puts Saul and he stays there for three years remember the number three is the number of separation for service the Lord Jesus was in the heart of the earth three days Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days the Israelites come away from the Red Sea three days journey that Moses asks Pharaoh let us go a three days journey into the wilderness that we may sacrifice three is the number of separation it's three is really the Afaridzo number and so it is highly significant that Paul says here in Galatians the God who separated me from my mother's womb is the God who called me through his grace that I might reveal his son that his son might be revealed in me that I might preach him among the Gentiles I did not confer with flesh and blood not only has he been separated from Israel but he's even been separated from the men in the church he says I didn't get this gospel by close contact with the other eleven apostles God separated me out God gave this to me by direct revelation he was trained by the Lord Jesus Christ in the same way that the first eleven were trained by the Lord Jesus Christ he says this good news this gospel this revelation of the mysteries Peter didn't give me this gospel James didn't give me this gospel John and the rest of them didn't give me this gospel I didn't go to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me I went to Arabia and returned again to Damascus and this in connection with what he says in chapter 5 of Galatians makes us think that in this section of Acts the gospel that he receives and the powerful preaching that he does is something that he received by direct revelation from the Lord Jesus just like the other eleven he has been aphorizod he's been separated from Judaism separated from pharisee is separated even from the other apostles set apart literally for this stewardship of the mysteries and after three years he goes up to Jerusalem to see Peter and remains within 15 days but he has had three years to digest and develop and come to understand what the Lord Jesus reveals to him possibly in the desert of Arabia I think if you had to throw a dart into the life of Paul and pick a time when the Lord Jesus personally trained him these three years are it how long by the way did Jesus train the first set of disciples three years so and and that was also to separate them from their Jewish roots and prepare them

for their function as apostles and then calling them out the career that Paul has that he details in other places about his shipwrecks and his beatings and his imprisonments and so on takes place later when he is prominent and notorious and is very much hated and an enemy he seems to escape a lot of that in these earlier days he gets out via the basket escape from Damascus he leaves Jerusalem in the care of Barnabas before they are able to kill him or do anything to him and he goes to Silesia and to Syria which of course is the Damascus area again and Silesia Syria is going to be his stopping grounds for the next 14 years and this again is where he is going to steep where he's going to mature where he's going to synthesize and enhance his understanding of what the Lord Jesus has revealed and where is he going to get that grist for the mill it's his knowledge of the Old Testament he's got his scrolls he's got his parchments and he's going back through the Old Testament and with what the Lord Jesus has revealed he's having aha moments every other day saying of course and this is what you find reflected I think in the epistle to the Hebrews which is chock full of Old Testament application and shadows of the New Testament truths and why is it an anonymous book I think that the Apostle Paul wrote it but his name had become such an anathema to the Jews in Jerusalem and Judea that he could not put his name on it and have it be heard so he leaves his name off people say well it can't be Pauline because he put his name on all of his letters well there's a good reason to not put his name on an epistle to the Hebrews he wants the Word of God to speak for itself and not to have them be polarized by seeing his name at the front hi there I'm Paul and I say well I'm not going to listen to anything you have to say he says look God spoke to us in times past God has spoken to us in these last days and he says you need to listen to God speak don't worry about who the intermediate messenger is and so I firmly believe that that the Apostle Paul is the author of the book of Hebrews and you can see the full understanding of Old Testament scripture and it's carrying forward and it's fulfillment in the new in the pages of that book but even if you don't accept Pauline authorship of that you can see it throughout the rest of his epistles how many different times does Paul appeal to Sarah and Hagar to Abraham to Moses to all of the the great truths of the Old Testament so what's the point of this section now we see Paul has sort of a brief moment in the Sun and then disappears from the scene and we start looking at Peter again we've seen this exact same thing happen in 1st Samuel haven't we David gets anointed by Samuel and comes to the king's palace and he's been anointed to be the next king he says well maybe this is my road to fame and yet after a while he leaves the palace and goes back to his father's sheep so much so that the next time Saul sees him which is on the occasion of Goliath he doesn't recognize him maybe two or three years have passed Patty suggested that he might have had his big growth spurt you know his late teen growth spurt and changed enough that he wasn't immediately recognizable if Saul had known him when he was 12 or 13 and now he's 19 or 20 because you remember three different times Saul asks the question on the day of the battle with Goliath whose son is he and he doesn't find out the answer until David actually shows up and when he sees him face to face he still doesn't recognize him this is the one who gave him so much relief when he was plagued by the evil spirit this is the one that he relied on to play soothing music when the evil spirit from the Lord comes to oppress him and and he gets relief

and refreshment and appoints and sends a message to Jesse and says let let your son stand before me I wanted to be my armor-bearer and Jesse says okay fine and David comes to the palace and David has this brief moment in the Sun and it seems like well now this is going to be my time of opportunity and then it fades out and David makes the decision to leave and in 1st Samuel it says David returned to his father from the court of Saul and the English messes up and says he occasionally went back and forth when it starts to go out there's no word for occasionally in there it says he went back he returned from Saul and went back to his father's sheep and I think the Masoretes have pointed the verb there is halak the word to walk and and it says he and they pointed it as a whole leg which is walking he was walking back and forth between his father and then Saul and then his father and then Saul but that is a Masoretic interpretation the consonants there are H L K and it's just as likely that it says he returned see they're trying to account for the fact that Saul knew him and that he was in the court and and how did he arrive back with the sheep so that Jesse would have to send into his brothers with the bread and so on why wasn't he still at the court they say well he went back and forth but it's right there in the scripture it says no he left he was there and he left he returned and went home he halak back to Jesse and he was watching the sheep once again he was not commuting and that's why several years later when the Goliath episode happens Saul has forgotten all about him doesn't recognize him has to ask three times who he is same thing happens with Saul he has this brief moment that seems like an opportunity and maybe he's going to be the great one to be eloquent enough to convince the people of Jerusalem and Judea that Jesus is the Christ and maybe he can accomplish what Peter and the rest of them have not been able to because of his credentials and because of his knowledge of the Old Testament he's seminary trained and they are not and yet he's only in Jerusalem for two weeks they try to kill him and he's got to flee there like he fled Damascus and so he's going to go home he's going to go to Tarsus he's going to go to Cilicia he's going to go to Syria back to where he did have some success over in the region of Damascus so the point here is are we prepared for obscurity are we prepared for a seeming level of no progress progress that is invisible rather than visible the Bible says that God is at work within us and a lot of times the great battles and the great victories are not observable by our fellow human beings and it can be a long slow process 14 years I think this is we're just coming up on the year 2004 so we go back 14 years and we're back at 1989 and 1990 and I think my gracious I was had only been married two years I was living in a different place had a different job hadn't gotten hardly any of my seminary training done in 14 years is a whopping long time ago for me when I think of all of the intervening time in Desert Storm had two kids and pastored in Tahlequah all these other things that have happened I think my gracious 14 years is a long long time and this is how long Saul is going to go out of sight and out of mind in the scheme of things and you have to wonder when he was up there in Cilicia when he was off in the small little villages of Syria well what about that great day on the road and what about the great prophetic utterance it was made by Ananias when the scale like blindness fell from my eyes and what about the when the Lord Jesus trained me down there in Arabia and I just seem to be spinning my wheels I'm going around in circles it's been a decade it's been 11 years it's been 12 years it's

been 13 years where is the great opportunity it God said I would stand before Kings I there's no kings out here in this godforsaken wilderness and it's a challenge it is required in a steward that a man be found faithful can we be faithful when no one is looking can we be faithful when it seems like it just doesn't matter that it's just small things small arena small opportunities small decisions small issues that don't seem to matter a hell of beans do you think that if Saul had not been patient and have not been faithful and have not availed himself of the opportunity to mature and to learn and to grow that he would have been ready 14 years later when God does call him to center stage and when God does call upon him to wreak havoc on the known world through the ministry of the gospel these 14 years are what make the Apostle Paul the instrument that is fit for God's use when God reaches out on his workbench looking for a trusty chisel that will hold its edge that he will be able to pound into the world as it exists in that day he's got tempered steel that has been forged in these 14 years of obscurity 14 years of invisibility and if he had not availed himself of this opportunity to learn and grow to develop to mature he would not have been the Apostle Paul he would not have been the author of inspired scripture he would not have been the one God used to minister to literally millions of believers over 2,000 years it's impossible to overestimate the importance of this decade and a half that he spends out of sight and out of mind so it's an encouragement to us to remember that there's a thousand years of important ministry just over the horizon we are in our period of invisibility our period of obscurity we are getting our small tasks our challenges to daily faith Paul puts this message out in the book of Romans which as we've talked about before is widely misunderstood what is the message of Romans Paul's perhaps has been called the apex of theological writing it's it's the grandest of the epistles in many scholars opinion but what is the message of that book righteousness by faith the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit the liberation from sin death to sin in order to serve God Abraham believed God and it was credited to him for righteousness he believed God day by day decision by decision righteousness by faith living faith daily faith and when we can use our time of wilderness wandering our time of like David with the sheep or like Joseph in prison or like Saul of Tarsus up there just milling around his hometown wandering around the region of Syria there is a time coming when we will be called upon for important work and will we be ready or not depends on how we use that intervening time well we have Peter and the healing of Aeneas and I pointed out one aspect of it which is that it demonstrates that the original 11 are sticking to their commission that the Lord Jesus gave them each person has their area of responsibility Peter doesn't run off to Damascus Saul of Tarsus doesn't come down to Jerusalem there is an assigned area of function and it would be wrong for Simon Peter to look at Saul and say well what's he doing over there talking to Jews in in Damascus I think that's my job I believe I'll go over there Jesus said no you will be a witness to me in Jerusalem Judea Samaria and so where does he go he goes to Lydda he goes to a place that's in his assigned area of responsibility we have to to watch as well that we look for the opportunities that God gives us we don't look over the fence at another believer and say well I should be doing what they're doing or I should be excelling where they are excelling each of us has a place in the body that great picture that the Apostle Paul gives us of each member of the body being an eye or a hand or a foot and

the hand can't you know one part can't say to another I have no need of you we all have assigned functions and to be careful to exploit our opportunities and our potentials you can see this in the interaction between Peter and Paul and in this section of Acts where we see them sort of changing places back and forth we see that God had a set purpose for Simon Peter God had a set purpose for the Apostle Paul and you can imagine Paul saying well boy that Peter he's making great great shakes down there in Jerusalem or you can see Peter in Jerusalem saying well Paul is making great shakes over there in Damascus would be a wrong thing to do what did the Lord say to Peter you will be a witness to me what did he say to Saul you will be a witness to me and they looked at the area of their assigned function their areas of opportunity their areas of potential and were faithful and patient to wait and watch and take advantage of whatever it was that God had for them in those days and in those years well this is a convenient place for us to pause in our study of Acts chapter 9 we'll pick up next time with resuming in Peter at Joppa in verse 36 we'll take a little bit more of a look at Aeneas and then at Dorcas and that will complete the chapter and lead us into chapter 10 and chapter 10 with the sheep being let down and the opening up of the mission of the good news preaching to the Gentiles is is going to be a great study but this is a good place to stop so we'll close in a word of prayer father thank you for the truth of your word and the clear way that you have illustrated and demonstrated your plan for our lives we pray that God the Holy Spirit will help us to see the application and importance of these truths in our own lives and in our own daily walk before you we pray that as a result we will clearly see our opportunities to serve and to reflect your glory and to prepare ourselves for future service and for time spent in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ we ask all these things in his name amen