

PAUL'S PATH TO MINISTRY

Acts 9:19-31 (ESV)

Immediately following his encounter with Jesus (9:1-9), Paul the persecutor baffled the Jews of Damascus. They knew he was coming to arrest members of the Way, but when he came to their synagogues, he actually promoted their movement!

Acts 9:19-22 Paul in Damascus Post Conversion

Paul really had converted and become a follower of Jesus. His knowledge of Scripture enabled him to persuasively demonstrate that Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled the Messianic prophecies of the Hebrew Scriptures.

We don't know how long Paul stayed in Damascus after his conversion. But at some point, Paul left Damascus for a place called Arabia, more accurately, Arabia Petraea. Arabia Petraea is not modern-day Saudi Arabia. Arabia Petraea was just south and east from Damascus. It included the territory on the east side of the Jordan River.

Paul left for Arabia Petraea between Acts 9:22 and Acts 9:23. This is a bit confusing because verse 23 seems to flow right out of verse 22; as if one happened right after the other. In Galatians, Paul tells us he went to Arabia Petraea from Damascus.

Galatians 1:11-18 Paul in Arabia Petraea

Arabia Petraea is not modern-day Saudi Arabia. In Paul's day it was the territory inhabited by the Nabataean Kingdom. The Kingdom of Nabataea was ruled at that time by King Aretas IV.

Paul indicates in this passage it was while he was in Arabia Petraea that Jesus revealed to him *the gospel*. We believe Paul was discipled by Jesus during this time. It is also likely Paul preached Jesus to the Nabataeans and that King Aretas IV opposed the conversion of his people to this foreign religion. His opposition may have compelled Paul to return to Damascus.

Acts 9:23-25 Paul in Damascus Post Arabia

In 2 Corinthians 11, Paul tells us a bit more about this experience. As we read 2 Corinthians 11:30-33, remember King Aretas IV is king of Nabataea located in Arabia Petraea. The governor mentioned here is King Aretas' representative overseeing the affairs for citizens of Nabataea living in Damascus.

Why would King Aretas know of Paul and want to arrest him? Best answer is that Paul had been in Nabataea and, knowing Paul, probably angered the king by evangelizing his citizens. This is the reason why we believe there is a significant gap of time between verses 22 and 23 in Acts 9. Paul left Damascus and went to Arabia Petraea and then returned to Damascus about three years later. After escaping Damascus and King Aretas, Paul went south to Jerusalem for the first time since becoming a follower of Jesus.

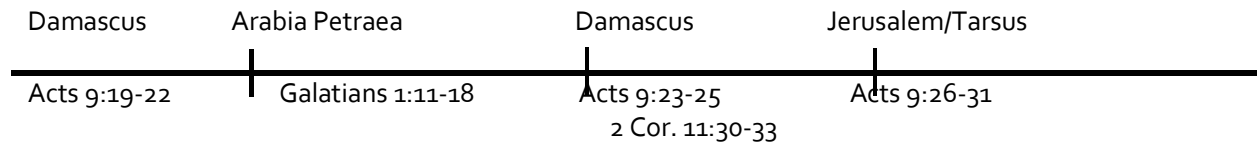
Paul's reputation as a hater and persecutor of Jesus and the Way was so seared in the minds of the believers that even after three years, believers in Jerusalem did not believe Paul was a follower of Jesus. Barnabas,

whom we met in Acts 5, vouched for Paul and won Paul's acceptance with the Apostles and believers in Jerusalem.

Acts 9:26-31 Paul in Jerusalem then Tarsus

Poor Paul! Even as a believer he brought trouble down on the Church in Jerusalem. It may be that the brothers sent Paul north to Tarsus, his hometown, as a safe place with his family.

Here, in summary, was Paul's path to ministry:



From this episode, we believe Jesus spent almost three years discipling Paul in Arabia Petraea. There was much Paul needed to unlearn in order for him to understand *the gospel*. *The gospel* is not the Four Spiritual Laws, it's the book of Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians. It's the deep theology and doctrine for which the Apostle Paul is known. We believe this was revealed to Paul during his time in Arabia Petraea.

This is a model for us today in that we should value rigorous training for those who lead and teach in our church. Our constitution rightly requires our pastoral staff attend seminary. We require our missionaries to have extensive training in Bible and theology. I am not suggesting that without a Bible degree or a seminary education a believer cannot teach or lead or have an effective ministry in the church, but even those who don't need to be trained here in the church.

There is an anti-academic mindset among some Christians that views academic training as anti-spiritual. We do not hold to these ideas. We value Christian education. We value seminary training for our pastoral staff. May the Lord raise up many others to follow the Apostle Paul's path to ministry.

Voice of the Martyrs Needs for September:

Donations for shipping boxes.