

# The Acts 19.5 Position

By Jeremy Lucas

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Its likely that the title of this article caught your attention because it seems nearly absurd. You've heard of the Acts 9, Acts 13, Acts 28, and for failure to include them... the Acts 2 believers. Each of them place their weight on one of these points in Acts because of what they believe has or has not changed up to that point.

Where I've struggled the most for the past few years has been in looking solely through a historian-eyed view of Galatians 1 and not seeing how it fits congruently into any of the above options. For it would seem that Paul utilizes Galatians to tell a careful presentation of what happened in the immediate period of time after he was first "set apart" or "separated." Logically speaking, if Galatians is Scripture as well and Paul makes a historical point of specifying where he was, who he saw, and who he didn't see, then we ought to be able to fit it comfortably into the text of Acts somewhere. Up until earlier this evening, no one that I had interacted with could lay out a timeline for me that made absolute sense. From time to time, I'd make my own timelines and still come up short. Inevitably, theology regarding "when the church began" became secondary to simply figuring out "when does Galatians 1 fit into the book of Acts?"

Finally, tonight someone gave me a general concept and a verse to which someone might otherwise overlook because of the textual usage of verses and sections (that weren't there initially) in our Bibles. At first, I saw the theory as just another possibility, but after coming home to sit down with it for a fair amount of careful consideration and study, I'm relieved to say that it makes sense. Again, it doesn't necessarily answer the question of when the church began... it simply means that there is indeed a point at which Galatians 1 fits in to the account of Acts chronologically speaking.

Here are three things that we know from the history of Paul that apply to this conflict:

Acts 9 tells Luke's chronology of what happened to Paul after the initial blinding on the road to Damascus.

Acts 13 tells a chronology of what happened after the Holy Spirit "set apart" or "separated" Barnabas and Saul for the work that they had been called.

Galatians 1 tells a chronology, from Paul's perspective of two very different possible time periods. Since Paul seems to be indicating a time when he was beginning to serve the cause of Christ (rather than hinder it), many would associate this chronology with Acts 9. Those who would lean toward Acts 13 would do so historically because that is when the Holy Spirit (in 13:2) actually says the words, "Seperate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them."

These are things we know.

What's troubling is how Galatians never seems to just "fit" in either Acts 9 or Acts 13 category. For the sake of its being quite late tonight, I won't mess too much with the flaws of chronology for the Acts 13-Galatians 1 timeline because there are many more dilemmas there than in the Acts 9 leaning. Having said that, let me present the unexpected timeline that was given to me after the service tonight:

Keep in mind that the verses I quote here will be out of both Acts 9 (Green) and Galatians 1 (Purple), but no verses will be skipped in the process (Blue will be the color for notations of peak interest). They'll just be intertwined according to the rough idea that was given to me this evening.

"And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized." Acts 9:18

"And when he had received meat, he was strengthened." Acts 9:19a

\*\*\*Break in the middle of a verse (the "19.5" position).\*\*\*

"But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by His grace," Galatians 1:15

"To reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood:" Galatians 1:16

"Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus." Galatians 1:17

Having returned to Damascus, we return to Acts.

"Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus." Acts 9:19b

"And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God." Acts 9:20

"But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?" Acts 9:21

"But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt in Damascus, proving that this is very Christ." Acts 9:22

"And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him." Acts 9:23

"But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him." Acts 9:24

"Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket." Acts 9:25

Many days could mean several things, but in this theory, those "many days" of verse 23 would be the equivalent of "three years" from the next verse chronologically from Galatians 1.

"Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days." Galatians 1:18

Herein, what we've seen is not much that is difficult to line up, but the following becomes ever so slightly jumbled in my limited, late night view. For what we're essentially seeing is that the disciples of Damascus lower Paul over the entrance to the city so that he can escape. According to Paul, if this timeline fits, it was after escaping Damascus that he decided to go to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Peter.

"And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed that he was not a disciple." Acts 9:26

The trouble here is that according to Luke, Saul was attempting to join himself to the disciples which wouldn't be so bad except for the notion that Paul says he only went there for one reason... to see Peter. What reason does Luke have to document Saul as appearing to be "needy" of fellowship by the disciples? This could be a very petty point of conflict, but I can see past it for the reality that so many other things do manage to fit comfortably. In fact, one way to consider the "trouble" of this lining up is to imagine that Saul had every intention of simply visiting with Peter, but upon entering the city, felt it necessary to "attempt joining himself" to the disciples as a source of resting and encouragement.

"But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles," Acts 9:27a

"But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother." Galatians 1:19

"Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not." Galatians 1:20

The connection of 9:27a and 1:19 is a very intriguing one really. According to Acts, Barnabas brought him to the apostles: plural. It only takes two to make any single individual plural. Initially, Saul did not have the approval of local disciples, but the "apostles" had not given their approval of him. According to Galatians, the only two apostles he saw were Peter and James. Is this difficult to concede? Not really. Look at the council in Acts 15 and who actually spoke. Just two men. Peter and James once again. Could they have been the only two present when Paul first visited Jerusalem? Absolutely.

So upon Barnabas having brought Paul to Peter and James (apostles)...

"...and declared unto them how he (Saul) 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." Acts 9:27b

The above passage includes a portion that could very much elude to this period in Arabia. The portion says "had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him." Indeed one could look at this alone and come to a fair conclusion that it is a reference to the "road or way to Damascus." I wouldn't disagree with this notion, but it is plausible for one to lay out the other argument. Thus being that Paul's time with the Lord for instruction took place in Arabia and Barnabas himself was referring to it.

"And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem." Acts 9:28

If this particular trip, as Paul notes in Galatians, was only fifteen days, then it would make sense that upon the end of those days, he would then be "coming in and going out" from the city. Initial visit would have been over.

Then what? What was he doing "coming in and going out at Jerusalem?"

This was the final cap off for me that I've battled with in my mind for about 5 years. Geographically, these points have never been able to line up because if Galatians said one spot, Acts would say he went somewhere else. It was a careful examination of this provided timeline that I finally saw the last piece fit in the puzzle. Not because any of the information changed, but because of where the portion of Galatians began in the Book of Acts... Acts 9:19.5.

So let's see what happens around this "coming in and going out."

"And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him." Acts 9:29

"Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus." Acts 9:30

Rather than states or nations at the time, much of the area was divided into regional locations. Caesarea was to the west of Judea and landed in the general area of Syria and Samaria. Tarsus, on the other hand, fits undeniably into Cilicia, or Southern Asia Minor.

Syria and Cilicia?

"Afterwards, I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia;" Galatians 1:21

Afterwards? After the time he spent in Jerusalem speaking boldly in the name of Christ, meeting with Peter and James, disputing the Greeks, and finding himself being threatened by them, fifteen days had passed and his "coming in and going out" took him along the water (Caesarea) and up into modern day Turkey (Tarsus).

"And was unknown by face unto the churches of Judea which were in Christ:" Galatians 1:22

"But they had heard only, that he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed." Galatians 1:23

Had Paul not gone up into Samaria, Syria, and Cilicia, he might have chosen to visit areas of Judea in order to make his face known, but his route led him to the pivotal location of Tarsus.

What's interesting is that up to this point at the end of Galatians 1:23, he has left Jerusalem for Syria knowing that still many of the people in Judea don't recognize him as an apostle. But as he departed, the word spread in Judea as he journeyed up along the coastline.

"Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea 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." Acts 9:31

Understandably, chronology puts the following verse in Galatians 1 to end the history...

"And they glorified God in me." Galatians 1:24

As Paul travels along the water up into Tarsus, the testimony of who he is, what he represents, and the legitimacy of his apostleship becomes quite a bit more established. We know, of course, that this authenticity was in question several times in various epistles that get written years later. And the most prevalent of doubters would have been the people of Judea... those who never got to know him by face, but rejoiced solely through what they heard. Not to mention that the "churches of Judea" were the farthest they could be from most of what Paul did in his ministry.

So why call it the Acts 19.5 position? Because I'm being a little bit facetious as well as counter to the standard. Rather than approaching this as a chapter issue for defining where the church began, I'm saying that Acts 9:19.5 is the point at which forward progress of equal and balanced chronology begins. I'm saying more explicitly that "19.5" is the point at which Paul goes to Arabia. From here we could have a theological discussion about the point at which progressive revelation either does or does not affect the beginnings for the Body of Christ, but it's an invaluable and essential piece for those historians among us who have to see things make sense.

Imagine that you were to give a mathematician a situation that required an equation, but he was, for reasons applying to the information you gave him, having a difficult writing out that equation... let alone finding a solution. For my history-based brain, the answer required an equation that two people have impacted over the past six months. The final part of the equation came tonight at church upon a brief discussion. At the time, I wasn't sure. But after laying it out like this... I can't help but be sure.

My encouragement is that you read back through the timeline given to see if it really makes sense to you. Perhaps I did make an error in my attempt to lay out each piece and that will require correction. Feel free to dig into this one, test it out, or challenge it based on a counter argument. I'm certainly open, but for me, finding this piece of "19.5" was like finding  $x$  in an equation where you're trying to find  $y$ . Once you uncover the single variable that held you back from discovering solutions, the rest is just elementary mathematics.

If nothing else, hopefully this will offer you as fresh a look into the "Acts 9" topic as it was to me. May the Lord Jesus Christ be the genuine strength of your walk in Him.