

## **THE DAMASCUS ROAD**

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#### **Literary Setting:**

The Damascus Road is placed strategically within the first half of Acts on the mission of the Jerusalem church just as the Hellenists have begun to move the gospel outside the boundaries of Jerusalem. Luke sandwiches the Damascus Road account between accounts of Philip and Peter to interpret this experience as a part of the Hellenist movement outward and part of God's divine plan. Luke formally introduces Saul of Tarsus and his divine call as the preeminent Apostle to the Gentiles bringing the Hellenist movement to full fruition. First, however, before launching directly into Paul's mission, Luke brings Peter back into the narrative for his final major appearances. Peter's experiences with Cornelius will show divine approval for this gospel movement outward and the career of Saul of Tarsus so integrally connected to it.

#### **Outline:**

- I. Saul the Converted (9:1–22)**
  - A. The Appearance to Saul (9:1–9)
  - B. The Call to be Persecuted (9:10–18a)
  - C. The Witness to Christ (9:19b–22)
- II. Saul the Persecuted (9:23–31)**
  - A. In Damascus (9:23–25)
  - B. In Jerusalem (9:26–31)

#### **Theological Significance (Stevens):**

The figure of Peter serves a vital role at this point after the Damascus Road. For Luke, Peter theologically functions as the official link to the original Twelve and the mission of Jesus. With the Petrine validation of Cornelius's conversion, Paul's life work for Luke also is certified as an expression of the original Twelve and the very heartbeat of Jesus himself, the fulfillment of Simeon's prophecy told at the presentation of the baby Jesus in the temple (Luke 2:32). Further, Paul's life work will force the issues of the Stephen Speech—the crucial center of the Hellenist cycle—like no other Luke knew, tragically illustrating the fundamental themes of that speech not only for the church, but also for Paul himself. So, concisely stated, the theological significance of this Damascus Road event in terms of the overall structure and purpose of Acts is that, for Luke, Paul:

- (1) fulfills the Hellenist movement and the intent and ministry of Jesus
- (2) best illustrates the themes of the Stephen Speech.