

Acts - Chapter 9

The Apostle Paul: Interesting Facts and Things to Consider

- a) Hometown was Tarsus (21:39), (Roman governed) in what is southern Turkey
- b) Roman citizen by birth (22:25-28) & his father was a Pharisee
- c) He was a Pharisee (26:5) and Jewish heritage was of the tribe of Benjamin
- d) Profession was tentmaker or leather-worker (18:3) and had a sister & nephew (23:16)
- e) Educated in Judaism under the famous Doctor of Jewish Law, Gamaliel (22:3)
- f) Life is a testimony to how great a work the Lord can perform using a willing heart
- g) Second to the Lord Jesus Christ, he was probably the greatest evangelist in history
- h) Did not experience the “earthly” relationship with Christ as the other 12 Disciples
- i) Had the Unique Experience of meeting the Ascended and Glorified Jesus Christ
- j) Wrote half the New Testament (Romans, Corinthians 1&2, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians 1&2, Timothy 1&2, Titus, Philemon, possibly Hebrews) and was integral in establishing these various churches
- k) Resurrected a young man who fell out of a window during his sermon (20:7-12)
- l) Survived without a reaction to a venomous snake bite, and burned it in fire (28:3-5)

Chapter 9

Verses 1-2: Saul, the zealous, dogmatic Pharisee and crusader of Judaism, continued in his unrelenting persecution of those Jews who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and His Messiah-ship. Saul was first introduced in Acts 7:58 where he “stood by and consented to” (Acts 22:20) the murder of Stephen. Saul was an official witness and approved of the martyrdom of Stephen. Stephen’s murder ignited unbridled persecution of the believers (Church) in Jerusalem causing a mass exodus (excluding the apostles), from Jerusalem into Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1). Saul “made havoc (a wild boar) of the church” - - he created great destruction of the Church (Acts 8:3). Saul viciously traveled from house to house dragging out disciples of Jesus and throwing them in jail. He was determined to pound dread, horror, and fear into the hearts of the disciples, and made it his “mission” to permanently exterminate them from society. Saul was so “mad” at them that he “compelled them to blaspheme” (Acts 26:11). Saul had legal authority from Jewish leadership (Sanhedrin & high priest) to persecute and to execute the Believers. He was determined to relentlessly defend his Jewish faith from this new, blasphemous, and dangerous Jewish Messianic sect!

Saul was determined to locate them wherever they were, and ensure they would not be able to escape the punishment they deserve for renouncing Judaism and becoming “disciples of Jesus Christ” and followers of “the Way.” Even if he had to travel long distances, he would do so and drag them (whether men or women) back to Jerusalem to be punished for their “apostasy.” He thirsted to go even as far as Damascus (150 miles north of Jerusalem -- about one week’s walk!). He obtains permission from the high priest (the letters) to go to the synagogues and “hunt down” the blasphemous heretics. The early Jewish believers were still attending the synagogues; the synagogues in Damascus had to cooperate with the authorization Saul possessed. Saul purposed to transport the followers of Jesus in Damascus back to Jerusalem to stand trial before the Sanhedrin to possibly face death!

Verses 3-4 (Beginning of Saul's Conversion): Saul and "the men which journeyed with him" (9:7) were now close to their destination of Damascus when the "Supernatural" happened...suddenly a great and powerful light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shined around him. The "Light" from heaven was so intense that Saul fell to the ground (surrender). Saul was having a personal experience with the Resurrected and Ascended Son of God, The Lord Jesus Christ...The Lord Jesus Christ challenged and questioned Saul, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me (the Church)?" How overwhelming this experience must have been for Saul because not only was Jesus Christ, the Resurrected, Ascended, and Glorified Son of God speaking directly to him, but Saul had believed that Jesus Christ was "still" dead from the Crucifixion.

Verse 5: Saul believed it was The Lord who had manifested His Presence before him, yet he questioned The Lord for assurance. The Lord confirms to Saul, "I am Jesus who you are persecuting..." No doubt now Saul sees, hears, and feels the Resurrected, Ascended Jesus Christ - - Jesus was not dead anymore! Jesus states, "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks": An ox when first yoked usually resented being forced to work (plow) and would kick back in rebellion. The plowman, in response, would hold a staff with a sharpened spike (ox goad) to its heel, so that each time the ox kicked, its foot struck the sharp spike. This pain received for kicking and rebelling taught the ox submission and not to fight back. The Lord Jesus was commanding Saul to stop persecuting and fighting against Him and His Will...the spread of Christianity! Fighting against God is futile...it's useless. The message is it is impossible to fight against God's Will successfully, therefore do not fight against the Will of God...Say Yes! Paul also references "kicking against the pricks" in his testimony to King Agrippa (Acts 26:14).

Verse 6: Saul went from one extreme to the other...he was transformed from one who put horror and fear into the hearts of men and women and judged them as if he was God, to one whose own heart was overwhelmed with fear by God. He was transformed from a man who was arrogant, judgmental, merciless, presumptuous and made men "bow" to him, to one who now bowed himself, in humility, to the Lord. Instead of giving orders and commands, Saul was now reverently taking Orders (from the Lord). He asked the Lord, What do You want me to do? The Lord Jesus commanded him to go to Damascus and wait for further instructions. Saul traveled to Damascus with the intention of persecuting the disciples (Christians), not becoming one! God's Will transcends the will of flesh and spirit...His Thoughts are greater than our thoughts and His Ways are greater than our ways!!! (Isaiah 55:8-9)

Verse 7: When the Lord speaks, "His Word does not return to Him void" (Isaiah 55:11) - - His Word will perform the Purpose and reach exactly who "He" is supposed to. God's Word was for Saul and Saul alone...God is very Precise in what He does and He does not operate in a way outside of Excellence. The men traveling with Saul were speechless or awed by the Divine event which was taking place, however, they heard the inaudible sound of a Man's voice and yet did not see the Lord! Only Saul heard the words of the Lord...the Lord called Saul to apostleship!

Verses 8-9: The once proud Saul arose from the ground blind and “helpless.” He had to humbly depend upon the men who traveled with him to “hold his hand” and lead him to Damascus. This was Saul’s “second blindness” in that his first “blindness” was spiritual - - he viciously, cruelly, and self-righteously persecuted and slaughtered those who believed in Jesus Christ the Son of God. Now he was experiencing his second blindness, for three days, which was physical. During this period Saul also went without food and water as if what was being “formed” in him was a new “appetite” or “hunger” for the Lord Jesus Christ. He was being “emptied” so that the Lord could fill him with the Holy Ghost (v.17) and go and preach the Crucified, Resurrected, Ascended, & Glorified Jesus Christ!

Verses 10-11: There was a disciple of the Lord in Damascus named Ananias who the Lord was going to use to minister to Saul and “open his eyes and his heart.” (*Note: This is not the same Ananias in Acts 5 who attempted to deceive the Holy Spirit and fell dead). The Lord spoke to Ananias and instructed him to go to Judas’ house on Straight Street and ask for Saul of Tarsus. The Lord also said to Ananias that as they were speaking, Saul was praying to Him! How powerful was that Word - - The Lord sees and hears who is calling upon Him ALL the time! How interesting that Saul was physically on Straight Street and the Lord was spiritually placing him on “Straight Street!”

Verses 12-14: The Lord informs Ananias that He has revealed to Saul in a vision, that he (Ananias) would be coming to him and laying his hands on him to receive his sight (The Lord has the Power to perform His Will using anyone and by any means He chooses). Ananias knew of Saul’s cruel, merciless, and wicked reputation - - he knew about Saul’s persecution towards the saints in Jerusalem (Previously terms such as “disciples” and “the Way” had been used to describe believers in Jesus Christ...now we see the term “saints.” Meaning of saints: Those set apart by God for His Use). He knew how Saul had received letters from the chief priests to drag men and women out of their homes, cast them in prison, and possibly have them executed - - Ananias was fearful and extremely concerned about this “transformed” Saul.

****Note:** Saul was about to receive his “sight” naturally and spiritually (v.18) - - God’s Grace IS Amazing! I was lost, but now I am found...I was blind but now I see! This Experience with Jesus was necessary because Saul was so intensely dogmatic and zealous about Judaism, that it is probable no man could have convinced him otherwise - - It took the Lord Himself to show Saul that Christianity and the Gospel was God’s Will!

Verses 15-16: The Lord assures Ananias that he has nothing to fear and do as He (the Lord) has instructed him (v.11) to do. The Lord further reveals to Ananias that Saul is a “chosen vessel” or a “special instrument” the Lord is planning to use to spread the Gospel (Christianity) and witness to Gentiles, kings, and to Israel (Jews) also! Saul created great suffering and death for those who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, now as a Convert he would experience the same suffering that he created for others. Of course, just as he persecuted others as a Jew and a Pharisee, he would be viciously persecuted by the same dogmatic Jews (his own brethren).

Verses 17-18: Ananias trusted in what the Lord revealed to him and obeyed the Lord. He traveled to Judas' house, laid his hands upon Saul, declared his conversion into the "family of Jesus Christ" as Brother, and declared the Lord sent him that Saul would receive his sight and be filled with the Holy Ghost. Immediately the "scales" or the obstructions which "blinded" him in his belief that Jesus was dead and not the Messiah, fell from his eyes and he received his sight...I was blind but NOW I see!!! Saul then received water baptism.

***It is important to note that the Lord can use anything or anyone to perform His Will, and it does not have to be someone with experience, license, or other credentials. Ananias was not a licensed minister, apostle, elder, pastor, prophet, deacon or bishop - - he was just a follower and believer in Jesus Christ. Ananias was a "layman" who was obedient to the Lord and used as a Divine instrument in a great way. ALL believers and saints in Jesus Christ are his witnesses, "ministers", and "priests." Jesus commanded every believer in Matthew 28:19-20 to go and "teach" or make disciples (Christians) of all nations. Our responsibility as Christians and as the Lord's "royal priesthood" (1 Pet. 2:8) is to be witnesses and evangelists for the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus declared that we believers are the "salt of the earth" (Matt. 5:13) and the "light of the world" (Matt. 5:14). The "unconverted" are to see Jesus Christ in us and desire Him for themselves.

Verses 19-20: After not eating or drinking for three days, Saul ate and received again his physical strength. He stayed with the disciples there in Damascus for just a few days, yet immediately he went to the synagogues and began to preach that Jesus Christ is the Messiah and the Son of God..."To open their eyes, and to turn them from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Me (Jesus) - - (Acts 26:18)

Verses 21-22: Those who heard Saul preach so passionately about Jesus Christ being the Messiah (Saviour of Israel) were completely amazed because, they knew his reputation and how viciously he persecuted those who believed in the same Jesus he was preaching about. They said to themselves, as a matter of fact, isn't the reason why he came to Damascus was to arrest and put on trial the disciples of Jesus Christ? The Lord Jesus empowered Saul's preaching in such an awesome way that the Jews in Damascus were unable to successfully refute his proofs that Jesus Christ was the Messiah. Saul refuted the argument of the Jews and rendered the Jews defenseless!

Verses 23-25: These Jewish leaders (defenders of Judaism) became so incensed at Saul's "anointed witnessing" in that Jesus Christ was indeed the Messiah, they decided they wanted him dead. This same Saul who at one time the Jewish leaders "exalted" and "championed", have now violently turned against their "number one man" Saul. The Jewish leaders were salivating day and night for the opportunity to pounce upon Saul like a lion pouncing upon its prey. Thank the Lord that Saul was knew of their plot to assassinate him once he arrived at the city gate.

To help Saul escape murder by the hands of the Jewish leaders, and prevent their new “brother in Christ” from assassination, the disciples hid him in a basket and lowered him through a hole in the city wall during the night hour. ****Saul’s escape from death parallels those who also escaped death by being let down through a window: The two Israelite spies who escaped death from the king of Jericho (Joshua 2:15) and David escaped death from the hands of King Saul (1 Sam. 19:12).**

****It is important to note how quickly Saul received persecution once he gave his life to the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who once exalted him, now hated him to the point they wanted him dead. Jesus said, “And ye shall be hated of all men for My name’s sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved” (Matt. 10:22). We as Christians will suffer rejection from various sources (strangers, family, acquaintances, friends, co-workers, etc.); however, we must persevere because those who do shall be saved!**

Verses 26-28: Saul escaped death and arrived in Jerusalem. However, he decided to first analyze or evaluate (assay) the environment into which he was entering in, and the attitudes of the disciples in Jerusalem regarding his presence. (In Jerusalem is where he performed the great persecutions of “the Way.”) Saul’s desire was to fellowship with the disciples, but the disciples were still greatly fearful of him. They did not believe in his “Conversion” and considered it possible that he was just attempting to infiltrate the “body of Believers.” But Barnabas (Acts 4:36-37) “the son of consolation”, helped Saul and displayed compassion and moral support for him. He brought Saul to the apostles and testified regarding the Conversion, what the Lord spoke to Saul, and his bold preaching in the name of Jesus at Damascus. This testimony brought comfort, reassurance, and also encouragement to the hearts of the apostles. They realized it was genuine, Saul was accepted, and he was with them wherever they traveled.**

Verses 29-31: Saul continued to preach boldly in the name of Jesus, gladly challenging the Greek-speaking Jews (Hellenists). And of course, because the Jews were unable to “verbally defend” themselves against Saul’s “anointed preaching” that the Lord Jesus Christ IS the Messiah (v. 21-24), they were provoked and decided they wanted him dead. They began to plot to assassinate him, however, when the disciples (his brethren) realized that his life was in jeopardy, they transported him to Caesarea and from there he returned to his hometown of Tarsus. The “Church” now had arrived at a point in time where its persecution had subsided, and there was peace throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria. The Church began to grow in strength and numbers (multiplying), the Believers lived in fear of the Lord, and lived in the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

****Note A: How ironic, but POWERFUL, the man who once relentlessly and unmercifully persecuted and had executed the Believers of the Lord Jesus Christ (the Church), the one who made it his life’s purpose to “exterminate” the Church, the one who created havoc upon the church and was determined to prevent the spread of Christianity, now has been converted and transformed into a man who has “breathed life” into the Church. Saul has seeded strength and growth in the “Church”, and now instead of persecution, there is multiplication and peace!**

****Note B: A factor that also contributed to the Church's transition from persecution to peace was political changes in Rome. Emperor Tiberius died and the new Emperor Caligula wanted to erect a statue of himself in the temple at Jerusalem. This ignited the Jews in directing their energies towards Caligula instead of the Believers.**

Verses 32-35: Peter is visiting Believers in various areas of Judea and he decided to visit Lydda (located northwest of Jerusalem). He met a man named Aeneas who was paralyzed (sick of the palsy) and bedridden for eight years. Peter calls Aeneas by his name, declares to him that Jesus Christ was his Healer, and commands him to be free from that "bed of affliction"...Get up now!!! By the Omnipotent power of Jesus Christ, Aeneas immediately got up - - the Lord Jesus healed him, making him whole instantly!!! Everyone who lived in that area saw Aeneas healed and witnessed that the Power of Jesus Christ made Aeneas an "ex-paralytic" - - they saw proof that Jesus Christ WAS Resurrected and had power over disease. The physical healing of one man was the impetus for the spiritual healing of many - - ALL that witnessed this miracle turned to the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour!!!

****Note A: Healing from the Omnipotent Hand of God can be instantaneous (instant) as in Aeneas' case or it can be progressive as with the blind man in Bethsaida (Mark 8:22-25) who when Jesus first "touched" him "saw men as trees walking."**

****Note B: Another instance of Jesus' powerful healing of a paralytic man is in Matthew 9:2, Mark 2:3, & Luke 5:18 (his helpers broke through a home's roof to access Jesus)**

Verses 36-38: There was a disciple (Believer) named Tabitha (Dorcas in Greek meaning gazelle), who resided in Joppa (about 20 miles northwest of Lydda). She was a woman full of compassion and displayed generosity towards those in need, such as the poor. Tabitha became sick and died - - the disciples prepared her body for burial and laid her in an upstairs room. The disciples had heard that Peter was nearby in Lydda, and they sent two men to implore him to come to Joppa as soon as possible! (Emergency...911)

Verses 39-41: Peter returned with the men and was taken to where Tabitha's body was laid. When he entered the room he found widows weeping and began to show them the coats and other garments Tabitha made for them - - it appears she was a seamstress. Peter immediately changed the environment (from hopelessness to faithfulness) by "clearing the room" of all the weeping spirits. Now with just him and Tabitha's body, Peter knelt down before the Lord Jesus and began to pray in a powerful way that would "move heaven and earth!" Peter then turned to Tabitha and by the power of the Holy Spirit commanded her to "Get up." Tabitha opened her eyes and was resurrected from the dead. Peter assisted her in getting up, and called everyone back into the room to witness the "Resurrection Power" of the Lord Jesus Christ.

****Note: We should desire relationship with the Lord where our bond with the Lord is so genuine, intimate, and faithful that our sincere & humble prayers "move heaven & earth" and breathe "life" to "lifeless" circumstances - - just as Peter did!**

Verses 42-43: The news of Tabitha's resurrection from the dead spread all through the area and "pricked" many hearts to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter decided to stay in Joppa for a period of time, making his abode with a Jewish leatherworker (tanner) named Simon.

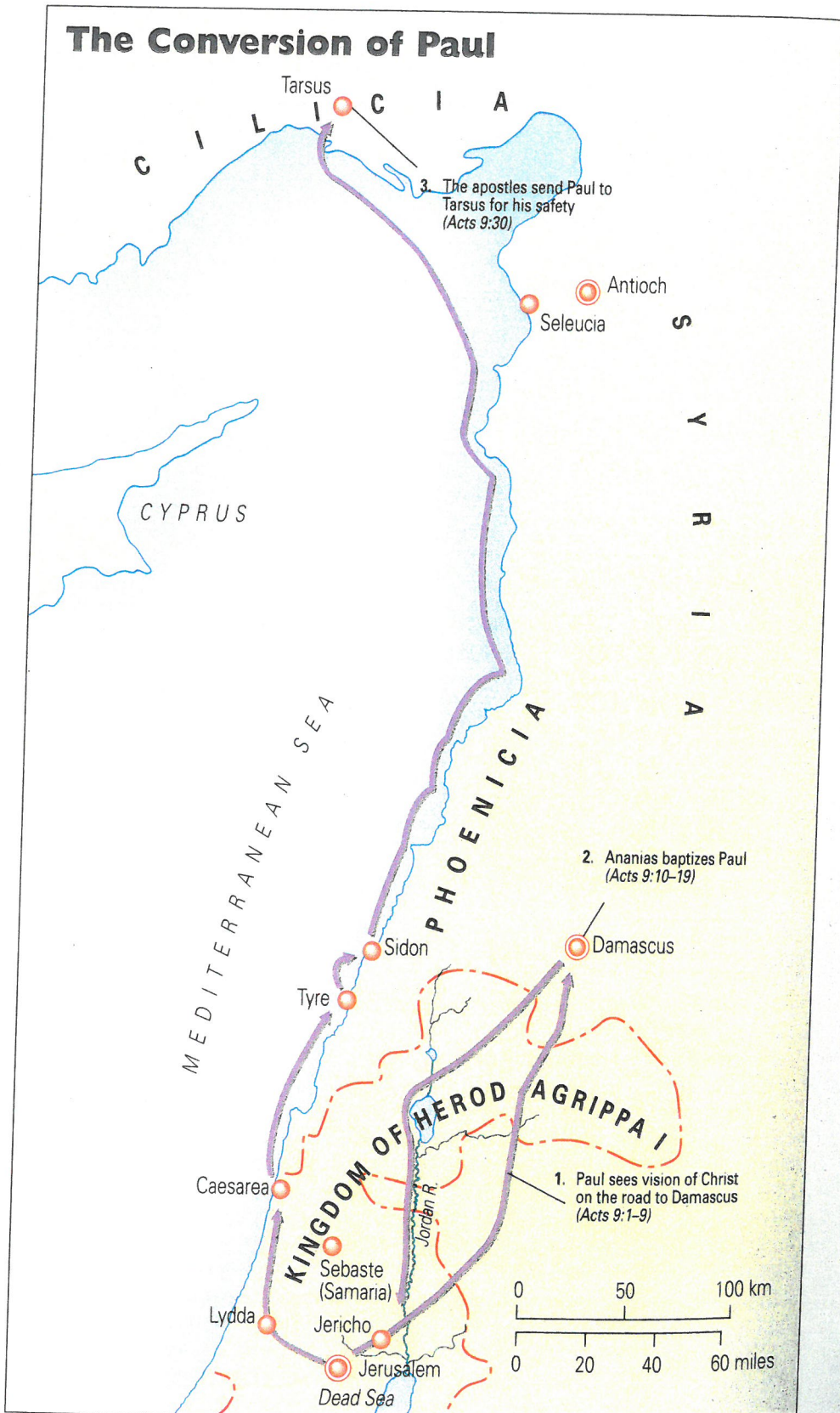
****Note:** Simon's occupation was considered socially unacceptable since he had physical contact with dead animals. Handling dead animals was contrary to Jewish ceremonial practices and caused one to be defiled or unclean (Leviticus 11). Peter living with a Jew whose occupation broke the ceremonial practices of the Law and made him "unclean", was significant in that it could be considered a catalyst for his prejudices about others to diminish. We will see in Acts 10 where Peter believed Gentiles were unclean and could not have the same type of relationship with God that a Jew (non-Gentile) could have - - Peter learns otherwise from the Lord Himself that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is inclusive...for EVERYONE!

Notable Resurrections

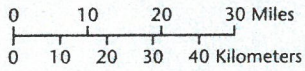
John 11:25, "Jesus said unto her (Martha, the sister of Lazarus), I am the Resurrection, and the Life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live."

- 1) Elijah's resurrection of the widow of Zarephath's son (1 Kings 17:17-23)
- 2) Elisha's resurrection of the Shunammite woman's son (2 Kings 4:17-37)
- 3) The male corpse thrown in the tomb of Elisha (2 Kings 13:21)
- 4) Jesus' resurrection of Jairus' daughter (Matt. 9:18-26; Mark 5:21-43; Luke 8:40-56)
- 5) Jesus' resurrection of the widow of Nain's son (Luke 7:11-17)
- 6) Jesus' resurrection of Lazarus (John 11:1-44)
- 7) The Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20)
- 8) Resurrection of the saints after Jesus' Resurrection (Matt. 27:53)
- 9) Peter's resurrection of Tabitha (Acts 9:36-41)
- 10) Paul's resurrection of Eutychus (Acts 20:7-12)

The Conversion of Paul



ROMAN DIVISION OF PALESTINE



Division of Herod's Kingdom to his three sons

- Territory of Archelaus
- Territory of Herod Antipas
- Territory of Philip
- Territory of the Proconsul of Syria

- City
- Decapolis city
- Herodian fortress
- Decapolis city (uncertain location)
- ▲ Mountain peak
- Extent of Herod the Great's kingdom