

Acts 9:1-6 (7-20)

Saul's opposition to Christianity in Acts reflects the political situation after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. So does the assumption that Damascus and Jerusalem lie within the same political jurisdiction. The author of Acts tries to put Paul's life before 70 CE into a credible political geography, but he unwittingly used the borders of the late first century instead of the early first century. Paul's own words (Philippians 3:6), however, make it clear that his zealotry for Judaism had led him to persecute the church. As to the vision on the way to Damascus, in 2 Corinthians 12:2-4 Paul relates an inaugural vision that might have been the basis for the vision report in our passage. Luke-Acts has the interesting practice of having important revelations come outside of but in the vicinity of major cities as, for instance, the Baptism of the Ethiopian in Acts 8:26-40 near Gaza, the Ascension in Acts 1:6-12 from the Mount of Olives outside Jerusalem, and the appearance to the men on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24:13-25. The major exception to this scheme is the revelation of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost inside Jerusalem (Acts 2:1-13). The Street Called Straight in Damascus now leads to the second-century CE East Gate.

Psalm 30

This *thanksgiving* psalm recapitulates the original lament which the psalmist prayed to ask for deliverance in verses 8-10. The danger from which he asked relief was the danger of death, expressed here in terms of descent into the underworld, Sheol. The deepest part of Sheol is called "the Pit" (*Abaddon*). Having been saved from death, the psalmist returns to the Temple to offer the promised sacrifice and public acclamation of God's faithfulness.

Revelation 5:11-14

The scroll in this passage is a reflection of the apocalyptic idea that the fate of the world was already written down in heaven and would be revealed only in the last days. Only the Lamb, whom the author introduced in 5:5 as the Messiah, can open the scroll to begin the events of the end of time. Later in the book, as the Lamb opens each of the seven seals, a part of God's end-of-the-world plan takes effect. The seven horns of the Lamb represent dominion (a figure from Daniel), and the seven eyes represent omniscience (a figure from Zechariah). Taken together, these horns and eyes correspond to the seven spirits who are the guardian spirits of the seven churches in Revelation 1:4 and are also the angels of the presence who stand before God. The four "living creatures" (5:8) are the *cherubim* who support the throne of God, and the twenty-four elders are otherwise unknown angelic beings. In 5:9-10, 12, 13 we have fragments of early Christian hymns.

John 21:1-19

Because of the ending in John 20:30-31 most interpreters believe John 21 is an addition to the Gospel composed by a student of the first author. The controversy over the death of the "beloved disciple" in 21:20-25 has convinced many that the occasion for the addition was the death of this revered figure whom many thought would live until the second coming. Peter's action of putting on clothing to swim to the shore to meet Jesus (21:7) derives from the idea that human nakedness is shameful and especially inappropriate in the presence of God. Indeed, Leviticus 6:10 and 16:4 even require the priest to wear linen breeches so that the nakedness of the priest could not be revealed in any way at the Lord's altar. Peter put on his clothes to swim to shore precisely because he was conscious of the divinity of the risen Jesus.