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Arabia during the Time of Paul

As a noun, the biblical **Arabia** refers to the Bedouin peoples of North Arabia, Syria, and Sinai (**Isaiah 13:20; Jeremiah 3:2 and 25:24**). From Herodotus onwards **Arabia** was applied by Greek writers to the peninsula between the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, extending to the ocean on the southeast and including the Sinaitic peninsula of the northwest.

Whether or not an actual **Arab** tribe ever existed is unknown, the word “**Arabia**” itself being a Greek coinage. The earliest reference to Arabs alludes to a certain Gindibu’ who supplied a thousand camel riders to **Ahab’s** coalition forces. **The Oral Law** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ, to see link click [Ei](#) - The Oral Law**) **mentions Jewish women from Arabia (Shabbat 6:6)**. The walled city of Taima and the kingdom of Dedan were regarded in biblical times as part of Edom (**Isaiah 21:13; Ezekiel 25:13, 27:20**). The latter was apparently followed by the Lihyan, a people unknown in the TaNaKh although many foreigners, including Nabateans, Taimanites, Greeks, and Jews resided in al-’Ula, the capital of the former kingdom of Dedan.

Despite their relatively late appearance, the Nabateans are well documented in the later biblical books and by **Josephus**, the assertion of their Arab identity being supported by the Arabic names carried by many of the peoples and gods. During the third century and the first half of the second century BC, the nomadic Nabatean tribes spread from Petra to the Gulf of Aqaba, where they took to piracy, and established themselves in the south Transjordan and the Negev. They eventually became an organized kingdom at the end of the second century BC during the Seleucid struggle between Egypt and Syria, and broke out into open war with Judea over disputed territory when Alexander Jannai (Jannaeus 103-76 BC) was looking to expand his kingdom. **Josephus speaks of the Nabatean kings as “kings of the Arabs” (Antiquities of the Jews 13.360)**. The strained relations continued into the Herodian period, war erupting again in Augustus’ reign. While Augustus appointed Aretas IV king (**Josephus Antiquities of the Jews 16.355**), who enjoyed a highly prosperous reign, the Nabatean kingdom finally lost its independence to Rome in the early second century AD. While Jewish communities are attested to in **Arabia**

(Shabbat 6:6), there is no other mention of **Arabian** congregations in the B'rit Chadashah. Likewise, nothing is known of any communities in the region of Petra prior to the reign of Constantine, although some suggest that Nabatean as a language was fairly well known among **the Jews**.²⁵

Paul's chronological itinerary during this period appear to be as follows. **He** encountered **Yeshua** on the road to **Damascus** (see [Am - Damascus during the Time of Paul](#)); after a brief period of ministry in that **city (Acts 9:20-23)** **he** went to **Arabia** for **three years**, being taught the gospel of grace directly from **Messiah**. There, isolated from all human contact, alone with **ADONAI**, the great **apostle** restudied the TaNaKh, not with **the Oral Law** corrupting **his** thinking, but, led by **the Ruach ha-Kodesh**, focusing on the cross of our **Lord Yeshua Messiah**. Out of all **his** meditations emerged the doctrine written in the book of **Romans**.

35 AD (see the commentary on [Acts Bc - Sha'ul Turns from Murderer to Messiah](#)).

35-37 AD Three years in Arabia

Only after **his** apprenticeship under **the Master** did **he** return again to **Damascus (1:17)** and began preaching which thoroughly frustrated **the [non-believing] Jews** who **plotted to kill him**. This was the first of many conspiracies against **Paul (Second Corinthians 11:21b-27)**. **But their plot became known to Paul**. **The [non-believing] Jews in Damascus, the mayor under King Aretas was guarding the city in order to seize Sha'ul**. Apparently, during **his three years in Arabia, he** had thoroughly preached the gospel and had worn out **his** welcome there also. **They** were **so** united in **their** effort that **they were** secretly **watching the gates day and night, to kill him (Acts 9:23-24)**. **A wall** surrounded **the city** and the only escape was through the gates, but **the disciples took Paul by night and let him down over the wall, lowering him in a large basket** made of reeds (**Second Corinthians 11:32-33**). After escaping **Damascus, Paul went up to Jerusalem** (see [As - Paul Meets Peter and James in Jerusalem](#)).

38 AD (see the commentary on [Acts Bg - Peter Goes to the House of Cornelius](#))

42 AD (see the commentary on [Acts Bh - Peter's Report to Jerusalem](#))



48 AD (see the commentary on **Acts 13 - The Council at Jerusalem**)

48 AD Galatians written