

<sup>19</sup> So when he had received food, he was strengthened. <sup>5</sup>Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus.

### ***Saul Preaches Christ***

<sup>20</sup> Immediately he preached <sup>5</sup>the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.

<sup>21</sup> Then all who heard were amazed, and said, <sup>4</sup>"Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?"

<sup>22</sup> But Saul increased all the more in strength, <sup>4</sup>and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this *Jesus* is the Christ.

### ***Saul Escapes Death***

<sup>23</sup> Now after many days were past, <sup>4</sup>the Jews plotted to kill him. <sup>24</sup> <sup>w</sup>But their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and night, to kill him. <sup>25</sup> Then the disciples took him by night and <sup>x</sup>let *him* down through the wall in a large basket.

### ***Saul at Jerusalem***

<sup>26</sup> And <sup>y</sup>when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple. <sup>27</sup> <sup>2</sup>But Barnabas took him and brought *him* to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, <sup>a</sup>and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. <sup>28</sup> So <sup>b</sup>he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out. <sup>29</sup> And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the <sup>c</sup>Hellenists, <sup>6</sup> <sup>d</sup>but they attempted to kill him. <sup>30</sup> When the brethren found out, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus.

#### **Real Talk with Roderick**

Saving Saul... Again (Acts 9:19-30)

#### **Some Were Amazed (Acts 9:19-22)**

<sup>19</sup> So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus. <sup>20</sup> Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God. <sup>21</sup> Then all who heard were amazed, and said, "Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?" <sup>22</sup> But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this *Jesus* is the Christ.

What he was for evil he became, by the grace of God and the gift of the Spirit (Acts 9:17), even more for Jesus. Before his conversion Saul was harmful in the highest degree to those that called on the name of Christ. Given his druthers he would have destroyed the church (Galatians 1:13; Acts 22:4-5). But Jesus intervened (Acts 9:1-6;

22:6-7).

After being humbled Saul's sight is restored, he is baptized, and is given the Holy Spirit for a ministry of making many see that **Jesus is the Christ**. But Although he can see again, has repented of his violence against the church, and has enabling from Heaven, the man is in a weakened state. He has gone three days without food or drink (Acts 9:9). He is in need of physical nourishment (Acts 9:19); **So** after receiving food **he was strengthened**. Having eaten Saul now benefitted from an essential element of a Jesus follower's walk - *believers fellowship*. For the first time this "Hebrew of Hebrews" (Philippians 3:5; Galatians 1:14) is in the company of disciples for reasons other than persecuting them. This thought must have crossed his mind numerous times as he talked with his new family: "You are such a wonderful person because of what Jesus has done in your life. I was actually going to punish you for your devotion to Him."

#### Questions for Community Discussion

1. What is the outcome of Saul's time spent with the disciples at Damascus? Where did the persecutor get the idea of preaching Christ? (Acts 9:19-20; Hebrews 10:24-25; Ephesians 2:10)
2. Are you stirred up toward anything by your time with disciples of Jesus?

After regaining his strength Saul took to the task of being a witness. **Immediately** (καὶ εὐθέως) **he preached the Christ in the synagogues**. His direction has changed 180 degrees but his intensity has not. What was formerly a mission to persecute the church has been transformed into a mission of promoting the church. Saul, a man who was coming to Damascus to take by force Jesus followers back to Jerusalem for trial, was now telling the Jews of that city that **Jesus is the Son of God** (Acts 9:20).

His preaching did not go unnoticed. Those who heard Saul were amazed. Two questions came to mind as they listened to him preach Christ.

- **Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem?** (Acts 9:21) - They are confused by his behavior. He is clearly in fellowship with the disciples and is promoting a faith that he once attacked. Imagine the bewilderment of the men who came with him. "Yeah, that is him. But ever since that light and sound on the road... he is not the same."
- **Is this not the one sent to arrest believers?** - Saul was supposed to seize disciples and take them back to Jerusalem to be tried before the high priest. Now he supports the disciples and is getting better than them at **proving that this Jesus is the Christ**.

What is Jesus doing through this man?

In the gracious conversion of His greatest critic Jesus dispels the notion that the church needs defending. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The kingdom of God is aggressively expanding at the expense of the gates of hell. The reality of the resurrection is turning relentless rebels into Jesus

followers. In the saving of Saul the Son of God has served notice: I am on the offensive.

#### Questions for Community Discussion

1. What does Jesus accomplish through the conversion of His critic? (Acts 9:21-22)
2. Who comes to mind when you think about people that you know that are openly antagonistic toward Jesus and his followers? Would it be noticed if those persons become advocates of Jesus and promoters of faith in Him?

#### Some Were Angry (Acts 9:23-25)

**<sup>23</sup> Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him. <sup>24</sup> But their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and night, to kill him. <sup>25</sup> Then the disciples took him by night and let *him* down through the wall in a large basket.**

The questions about what happened to Saul were the first response. However, it eventually became apparent to those who supported the persecution of the church that, whatever has happened to the Pharisee, it is now producing results that cannot be ignored. The **many days** of verse twenty three, based on Galatians 1:15-18, amounts to three years. In His classic work *The Book of Acts*, F. F. Bruce explains the timeline summarily:

Luke says that this incident took place “when many days had elapsed”; Paul, more definitely, says in Gal. 1:18 that it was three years after his conversion (by inclusive reckoning, no doubt) that he went up to Jerusalem—and from the narrative of Acts he seems to have gone to Jerusalem immediately after his escape from Damascus.

Bruce, F. F. (1988). *The Book of the Acts* (p. 192). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

During those three years Paul had gone to Arabia.

<sup>15</sup> But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb and called *me* through His grace, <sup>16</sup> to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, <sup>17</sup> nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those *who were* apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. <sup>18</sup> Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. (Galatians 1:15-18, NKJV)

Contrary to popular belief, the time spent in Arabia was not a religious retreat aimed at working through the consequences of His new faith. That would be inconsistent with Acts 9:20; he would not likely have stopped preaching immediately to retire for three years to Arabia for reflection. He kept preaching in Arabia and did something to seriously irritate King Aretas.α Commissioned by King Aretas, the ethnarch of Damascus was only too glad to help the Jews when they complained about Saul. In 2 Corinthians 11:32-33 more details are given.

<sup>32</sup> In Damascus the governor, under Aretas the king, was guarding the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desiring to arrest me; <sup>33</sup> but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands. (2 Corinthians 11:32-33)

What do we learn from all of this? There are two things that we must not overlook. First, the experience on the road to Damascus did not have a short-lived effect. *Saul is changed*. The principle is, again, as follows: *Whom God chooses he changes*. Second, the conversion of this particular persecutor has proven to be problematic for the religious establishment.

Principle: Passionate persecutors can become the most capable promoters when converted.

The optics for a Judaism that refuses to acknowledge the resurrection are bad. One of their own has defected and become an effective communicator on why others should do the same. In their reasoning there is only one thing they can do - *kill him*.

**Some Were Afraid (Acts 9:26-30)**

**<sup>26</sup> And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple. <sup>27</sup> But Barnabas took him and brought *him* to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. <sup>28</sup> So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out. <sup>29</sup> And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, but they attempted to kill him. <sup>30</sup> When the brethren found out, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus.**

In the absence of Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram the news of Saul's conversion has not become extremely widespread. Damascus is over a hundred miles away from Jerusalem. While it was probably known that he had changed sides it was not known if the change was genuine. Perhaps it was a ruse. In any case Saul was not immediately successful in trying to join the disciples (Acts 9:26). "Frankly, I have a hard time believing that Guy, who supported the killing of Stephen, has changed. I am not going to our regular gatherings if he is going to be there."

**But Barnabas**, a man of exceedingly great grace and notable for his desire and inclination to encourage others (Acts 4:36), **took him and brought him to the apostles**. A well-known and respected disciple helped Saul by taking him to the top and sharing the story of his conversion and his subsequent Christ-promoting conduct (Acts 9:27). All this was done to make it possible to have fellowship with the disciples in Jerusalem. Barnabas wanted his new brother to experience the acceptance that all should have, regardless of past sins, when they have truly come to Christ. And it worked. As a result of the intervention by a loving brother **Saul was with them at Jerusalem**. Is it any surprise that he quickly returned to doing what God had called and created him to do? As soon as he was able to enjoy the encouragement of Christian fellowship he returned to passionately carry out God's will. Saul began disputing with the same group that he had supported when Stephen was martyred. It got so bad that they were going to kill him. But his brethren found out and got him out of town.

To what end does God save Saul? That is, what interest does Heaven have in the conversion of a violent critic? The answer is simple really. The saving of Saul does much to settle the dispute concerning the Son God sent. For anyone considering in earnest the case for Jesus being the Christ, the conversion of Saul of Tarsus cannot be overestimated. The faith of Jewish followers then, today, and tomorrow gains an immutable voice of immense volume and immeasurable value in the radical change of this relentless church persecutor. Indeed, the case against Jesus as Christ crumbles as the prosecution joins the defense.

The conversion of Saul speaks volumes to those who claim they want a reason for believing:

Many have found in the radical transformation of this 'Pharisee of the Pharisees' the most convincing evidence of the truth and the power of the religion to which he was converted, as well as the ultimate worth and place of the Person of Christ.<sup>9</sup>  
McDowell, Josh D.; Sean McDowell (2011-08-17). *More Than a Carpenter* (Kindle Locations 1660-1661). Tyndale House Publishers. Kindle Edition.

#### Questions for Community Discussion

1. Why were the disciples afraid to let Saul join their fellowship? (Acts 9:26) Why did they not believe that he was a disciple?
2. What are your tendencies toward people who have had a history of huge mistakes? Are you willing to fellowship with them again? Would it matter if someone came to you with information substantiating their claims to have changed? (Acts 9:27)
3. Why does the fellowship accept Saul after the meeting with the apostles? (Acts 9:28) What effect does fellowship produce in Saul? (Acts 9:29)

#### Summarily Speaking (Acts 9:31)

**<sup>31</sup> Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.**

What began with the martyrdom of Stephen and violent persecution of the church (Acts 8:1-5) finishes with the saving of Stephen's enemies and a period of peace and prosperity for the church. When it is all said and done the Lord Jesus has been at working defeating His enemies with grace. And now there is not just the one church in Jerusalem. Through the crisis of persecution there are now **churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria** (Acts 9:31).

#### Questions for Community Discussion

1. Why did God allow the persecution of the church in Jerusalem? (Acts 8:1-4)
2. Why was Saul allowed to assail the church? (Ephesians 3:8; 1 Timothy 1:15)
3. How are you responding to difficult times in your church? Do you struggle with the idea that God could be using the crises to promote Christ?

#### Notes

α The hostile interest which the Nabataean authorities took in him implies that he had done something to annoy them—something more than withdrawal to the desert for solitary contemplation. The ethnarch looked after the interests of the many Nabataean subjects who lived in Damascus, and in general acted as King Aretas's representative in the city.

Bruce, F. F. (1988). *The Book of the Acts* (p. 192). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.