

## THE LIFE OF THE APOSTLE PAUL

### SAUL'S CONFLICTS AFTER CONVERSION: ACTS 9:19b-31

- A. Saul's first Christian ministry in Damascus (19b-22)
1. Fellowship and proclamation (19b-20), *For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus. And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God."*
    - a. A. T. Robertson, *Modern life is chiefly a blend of the Jewish contribution to religion, the Greek contribution to culture, and the Roman contribution to government. All these streams had already met in Saul.*
    - b. Saul's first fellowship with other believers was in Damascus.
    - c. He wasted no time in proclaiming in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God.
    - d. His habit would be to go to a synagogue first when he entered a city.
      - 1) 1<sup>st</sup> Missionary Journey, Acts 13:5, *When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews.*
      - 2) 2<sup>nd</sup> Missionary Journey, Acts 17:17, *So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there.*
      - 3) 3<sup>rd</sup> Missionary Journey, Acts 19:8, *And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God.*
    - e. *the Son of God*
      - 1) This is the only time phrase is used in Acts.
      - 2) The first thing Saul learned on the road to Damascus was who Jesus is.
      - 3) Note importance of this phrase in John 5:18, *This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.*
    - f. The importance of who Jesus is.
      - 1) Who Jesus is determines what He can do.
      - 2) A. T. Robertson, *With this faith he can shake the world. There is no power in any other preaching.*
  2. Response to Saul's preaching (21), *And all who heard him were amazed and said, "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?"*
    - a. *were amazed*
      - 1) It means *they were beside themselves; they were struck out of their senses.*
      - 2) H. D. M. Spence, *In the synagogues; the very synagogues (ver. 2) to which the letters of the high priest were addressed, empowering him to arrest either man or woman who called upon the Name of Jesus, and bring them as prisoners to Jerusalem to be tried before the Sanhedrin. No wonder they were amazed.*
    - b. *made havoc*
      - 1) The basic meaning is *to destroy.*
      - 2) Saul's intent was not punish Christians but to destroy them.
    - c. Some had problems with Saul's message, others doubted his motives, many could only see him as he was.
  3. Report of Saul's spiritual growth (22), *But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.*
    - a. Saul grew spiritually even though some did not want to give him a chance.
    - b. Your past will follow you but it doesn't need to overwhelm you.
    - b. *confounded*
      - 1) It means *baffled, perplexed their minds.*
      - 2) The one who persecuted followers of Jesus began proclaiming that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

B. Saul escapes from Damascus (23-25)

1. A plot by the Jews to kill Saul (23-24), ***When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him, but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night in order to kill him.***
  - a. *when many days had passed*
    - 1) It is possible that Saul's stay in Arabia took place between verses 22 and 23.
      - a) Galatians 1:15-17, *But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.*
      - b) Arabia was the kingdom of the Nabateans which stretched south and east from Damascus.
      - c) Thomas Constable, *After Saul's conversion and baptism he needed some time and space for quiet reflection and communion with God. He had to rethink the Scriptures, receive new understanding from the Lord, and revise his Pharisaic theology. So as Moses, Elijah, and Jesus before him, he retired into the wilderness.*
      - d) Spiritual maturity is not immediate. It takes time.
    - 2) The time frame was three years for his stay in Damascus and Arabia, and back to Damascus, Galatians 1:18, *Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days.*
  - b. The Jews made plans with King Aretas to kill Saul before he could leave Damascus.
    - 1) 2 Corinthians 11:32, *At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me.*
    - 2) William Barclay, *No one persecutes a man who is ineffective and who obviously does not matter...Counterfeit Christianity is always safe. Real Christianity is always in peril. To suffer persecution is to be paid the greatest of compliments because it is the certain proof that men think we really matter.*
  - c. Saul found out about the plot against him.
    - 1) A. T. Robertson, *It was a delicate situation for Saul, when he learned of the plot. He could, of course, meet his fate like a man and a Christian as Stephen and others had done before him. He did not lack courage. But was it wise to sit still and be killed? It is a wise man who knows when to run and when to fight.*
    - 2) Saul chose to go to Jerusalem and he knew how it felt to be persecuted.
2. Saul escaped in a basket over the city walls (25), ***but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket.***
  - a. *his disciples*
    - 1) These are believers who had come to faith under the ministry of Saul.
    - 2) Possibly, one of these owned the house on the wall from which Saul escaped Damascus, 2 Corinthians 11:33, *but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands.*
    - 3) Christians are to care for each other.
  - b. Stanley Toussaint, *...a strange turn; he had entered the city blind and left in a basket!*

C. Saul's return to Jerusalem (26-30)

1. His reception by the disciples (26-27)
  - a. The disciples were afraid to trust Saul (26), ***And when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple.***
    - 1) Saul went to Jerusalem after three years in Damascus to visit Peter, Galatians 1:18, *Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days.*
    - 2) The disciples did not trust his profession of faith in Christ.
      - a) Tom Constable, *Perhaps the fact that Saul had not sought out the apostles and other Christians in Jerusalem for three years following his conversion made the believers there suspicious of him. They had not met him personally, and since they were being persecuted they may have wondered if Saul had adopted clandestine methods to oppose them.*
      - b) Think of those who remember how their loved ones had been mistreated by Saul during his days of persecuting the church.
      - c) People have difficulty forgetting hurts and those who caused them.

- b. Barnabas defended Saul by telling of his conversion (27), ***But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus.***
- 1) Barnabas is first seen in Acts 4:36-37, *Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.*
  - 2) He defended Saul before the apostles and explained that Saul's conversion was genuine.
    - a) Saul saw Jesus on the road to Damascus.
    - b) Jesus spoke with Saul directly.
    - c) Saul preached boldly in the name of Jesus.
    - d) People are more impressed by how you live than by what you say.
  - 3) He emphasized the role Jesus had chosen for Saul.
    - a) Jesus' discussion with Saul concerning his future ministry, Acts 9:15, *But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.*
    - b) Saul was not just a true believer but an apostle, as well.
    - c) Requirement for apostleship is a personal witness of the resurrected Lord Jesus, Acts 1:21-22, *So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.*
  - 4) The role of believers in the development of Saul into Paul.
    - a) The prayer of Stephen, Acts 7:60, *And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.*
    - b) The obedience of Ananias, Acts 9:17, *So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."*
    - c) The trust of Barnabas in Saul, Acts 9:27.
    - d) Christians need each other because we are interdependent not independent.
2. Saul's ministry in Jerusalem (28-30)
- a. He freely preached about the Lord (28-29), ***So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists. But they were seeking to kill him.***
    - 1) Saul preached the message of Christ to Christians (*them*).
    - 2) He witnessed to Greek Jews.
      - a) Hellenists were Jews with Greek background.
      - b) Saul was familiar with their beliefs because he was born in Tarsus where many Greek Jews lived.
      - c) Stanley Toussaint, *Evidently Saul's debating ability proved to be too much for the Grecian Jews as they attempted to assassinate him.*
  - b. Christian brothers sent him to Tarsus to escape the threats (30), ***And when the brothers learned this, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.***
    - 1) Christian brothers escorted Saul to Caesarea, the seaport about 65 miles away, and then by boat to his hometown, Tarsus.
    - 2) Saul willingly left Jerusalem according to Acts 22:17-21, *"When I had returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance and saw him saying to me, 'Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me.' And I said, 'Lord, they themselves know that in one synagogue after another I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you. And when the blood of Stephen your witness was being shed, I myself was standing by and approving and watching over the garments of those who killed him.' And he said to me, 'Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'"*
    - 3) Thomas Constable, *Evidently Saul continued evangelizing in Jerusalem until it became obvious to the other believers that he must leave immediately or suffer death as Stephen had. They probably envisioned a recurrence of the persecution of the disciples that followed Stephen's martyrdom.*
    - 4) Serve where you are.
3. A gap in the record of Saul's life.
- a. We have no record of Saul's time in Tarsus (probably 37-43 A.D.)
    - 1) The next record of Saul is when Barnabas went to Saul, Acts 11:25, *So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.*
    - 2) Many of his experiences described in 2 Corinthians 11:24-27; 12:1-9 and Galatians 1:21-24 appear to fit in these years, if so, they show a man living, sharing and suffering for his faith in Christ.

- 3) Richard Lenski, *For more than ten years after his conversion and call the Lord's chosen instrument for bringing the gospel to the Gentiles is not active in his great special mission. All we can say is that this was the Lord's will. We should think that Saul was ready for his task, and his task was ready for him immediately after he had been called; the Lord evidently knew better.*
- 4) A. T. Robertson, *Christ had called him to go far hence to the Gentiles. Meanwhile there was work at home. In truth he was among the Gentiles already. Did he preach to them? The man who will not work for the lost at home will do little for Christ abroad.*

D. The church had peace and prospered (31)

1. Churches in Judea, Galilee and Samaria had peace from oppression (31a), ***So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up.***
  - a. *church*, this is a universal use of the word, all the churches throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria, not a designation of a specific meeting place of believers.
  - b. There was peace.
    - 1) Persecution had subsided.
    - 2) Christians were being strengthened in their faith.
    - 3) Peaceful conditions are perfect for preparing for future persecution.
    - 4) Peaceful conditions are perfect for preparing for future persecution.
2. The churches were growing spiritually and numerically (31b), ***And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.***
  - a. *walking in the fear of the Lord*
    - 1) This emphasizes the desire to live according to God's will.
    - 2) Being holy is not just a position but actions.
  - b. *the comfort of the Holy Spirit*
    - 1) The Holy Spirit comforts believers by confirming one's position as a child of God (justification).
    - 2) Conviction of the Spirit is comforting when we know it keeps us on track (sanctification).
  - c. Church growth is the result of walking in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit.
    - 1) The church multiplied because members were abiding in Christ.
    - 2) Harry A. Ironside, *When the Spirit of God has His way in the hearts and lives of believers, then unsaved people are going to be reached and won for Christ.*
  - d. This is the third of seven progress reports on the spiritual and numerical growth of the church, Acts 2:47; 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:30–31.

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| <b>CONCLUSION</b> |
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- A. Faith in Christ gives eternal life.
- B. Faith in Christ brings trials.
- C. Faith in Christ brings purpose that transcends the troubles of this life.
- D. Faith in Christ demands commitment to and trust in our risen Lord Jesus.
- E. A. T. Robertson, *The crucifixion of Christ had been the stone of stumbling for Saul. Now it is the rock of his faith. In the future Paul will go high and go deep, but he will never get away from the Cross as the center of his message. Around this he will place the love of God, the grace of God, the deity of Jesus the Son of God, the sinfulness of man, justification by faith, sanctification in Christ, all the great doctrines of grace.*