

Saul in Damascus & Jerusalem



Ice-Breaker

Who do people say you look like? Why?



Scripture Passage

Acts 9:19-31

¹⁹and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. ²⁰At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. ²¹All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?" ²²Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ.^a

²³After many days had gone by, the Jews conspired to kill him, ²⁴but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. ²⁵But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall.

²⁶When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. ²⁷But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. ²⁸So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. ²⁹He talked and debated with the Grecian Jews, but they tried to kill him. ³⁰When the brothers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

³¹Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.

a [22] Or Messiah



Bible Study

1. What would others have expected Saul to say when he came to the synagogue? When he proceeds to preach about Christ, how do they react (v. 23)? Why?

2. Why would the Jerusalem disciples still fear Saul? What risk is Barnabas taking?

3. People in Damascus and Jerusalem wanted to kill Saul. What does that say about him?

4. How is the story of Saul related to 1:8?



Reference Notes

9:19 The chronology of events begun here needs to be read in light of Paul's account of his early days as a Christian in Galatians 1:16-24. Putting the two accounts together, the following order of events emerges. After his conversion, Paul initially preached in the synagogues of Damascus (Acts 9:19b-22). He then departed for an unknown period of time to Arabia, perhaps for meditation and study, and later returned to Damascus (Galatians 1:17). It was apparently at this time that the Jews in Damascus plotted to kill him for stirring up controversy in the synagogues there (Acts 9:23-24; 2

Corinthians 11:32-33). "After three years" from his return to Damascus, he finally returned to Jerusalem. Since the Jews often reckoned time in inclusive terms, "after three years" may mean as little as a bit over one full year had gone by. Upon coming to Jerusalem, he stayed only two weeks during which time he only had contact with one apostle (Peter) and James, Jesus' brother (Galatians 1:18-19). During this brief stay, Paul preached in the Greek-speaking synagogues. Some commentators suggest that Paul, as a native of Cilicia, may have belonged to the same synagogue Stephen had belonged to since residents of Cilicia made up that congregation (6:9). Whatever the case, Paul experienced the same opposition Stephen did. To keep him from being harmed, other believers in Jerusalem sent him off to Tarsus in Cilicia (Acts 9:30; Galatians 1:21) where he remained for the following 10 years or so until Barnabas asked him to join him in ministry at Antioch (Acts 11:25-26).

9:20 That Paul, as a representative from the Sanhedrin, would be invited to speak in the synagogues is not unusual. What was unexpected was his message! ***Jesus is the Son of God.*** While this title is alluded to in only one other place in Acts (13:33), it is one of Paul's favorite ways of describing Jesus in the epistles. It captures the promises of 2 Samuel 7:14 and Psalm 2:7 which foresee the Messiah as God's Son exalted to a position of divine authority. For the early Christians, this was a clear reference to the fact that Jesus shares the qualities of God.

9:21-22 The shocked reaction of the Jews in Damascus is understandable given their previous understanding of why Paul came to the city.

9:22 *proving that Jesus is the Christ.* This was undoubtedly done by pointing out Old Testament passages about the Messiah that were fulfilled in the life and ministry of Jesus.

9:23 *After many days.* When Paul next returned to Damascus, the leaders of the synagogues were prepared for him. Perhaps under accusations that his teaching was causing an uproar in the Jewish community, the leaders were able to draw upon the help of the governor of the city in a plot to capture Paul so that they might kill him (2 Corinthians 11: 32-33).

9:25 *an opening in the wall.* Ancient cities were surrounded by walls as a defense against enemies. Although the city gates were being closely observed, Paul was able to escape from the city by being lowered over the wall in a large basket. When Paul tells of this incident in 2 Corinthians 11:32-33 it is in the context of describing the weakness and humiliation he has experienced as an apostle.

9:26 Having escaped from Damascus, Paul finds himself unwelcome among the believers in Jerusalem. ***the disciples.*** This refers to the church in general. ***were all afraid of him.*** Having been the victim of Paul's violent persecution a year or two earlier, the church was naturally hesitant to believe he had so radically changed. But believers have been consistently counseled to not let their fears get the best of them, or determine their behavior (see Matthew 1:20; 10:26-31; 28:5; Luke 1:13; 1:30; 2:10). While it is natural to fear those who might harm us, letting those fears control us keeps us from reaching out to those Christ wants to love and use.

9:27 *Barnabas.* See Acts 4:36. Barnabas takes on an important role later on as Paul's companion on his missionary trips. How Barnabas knew the reality of Paul's story is not explained, but it is clear that he risked alienating himself from the church by siding with this former persecutor.

9:28-29 Because of Barnabas' endorsement, Paul was accepted in the church. His activity, lasting only 15 days (Galatians 1:18), was concentrated among the Greek-speaking synagogues. This was an act of great courage since this was the same group responsible for arranging Stephen's death.

9:28 *speaking boldly.* Throughout this book, this style of speaking is seen as typical of the disciples (see 4:31; 14:3). They were not afraid to speak what they believed because they believed God was with them, and indeed was speaking through them. Jesus had promised this (Matthew 10:20).

9:30 *the brothers.* Right from the first, believers in Christ are seen as one family (see Mark 3:33-35). Caesarea. A port city about 60 miles from Jerusalem. From there Paul was sent by ship to Tarsus, an additional 330 miles away to the north. Tarsus was Paul's home city (Acts 22:3).

9:31 See also Acts 2:47 and 6:7 for previous summaries of the church. With the persecution over, and the uproar caused by Paul's preaching quieted down, the church throughout Palestine had a period of peace and growth. Perhaps those persecuting them thought they would just die away on their own. There is no record of the church's experience in Galilee, but since Jesus spent most of his ministry in that province, it is assumed that he had a sizable following there. With this summary, Luke prepares his reader to anticipate the next step of expansion for the church; to the ends of the earth (1:8).

Caring Time

1. What changes did people notice when you began following Jesus? How did they react?
2. Who has been a Barnabas to you? How? Whom have you served as a Barnabas?
3. What does "living in the fear of the Lord" (v. 31) mean to you?