

Abounding Grace Christian Church

The Acts of the Holy Spirit through the Church – Part 31

I. Exposition of Chapter Nine (Continued).

A. Verses 20-21 - Saul begins preaching the Gospel in Damascus.

1. Saul had had a radical experience with Jesus Christ that caused a complete change and turn around in his life's mission. Dr. Stanley Horton writes:

“Saul at once became part of the body of disciples in Damascus. Because he accepted the Lord’s commission, he did not wait to start preaching Christ. He did not go to the Gentiles immediately (cf. Rom. 1:16). Instead, as he would continue to do, he went to ‘the people of Israel’ (v. 15) first. Here he went to the synagogues where he had intended to search out the believers and send them bound to Jerusalem. But to everyone’s astonishment, almost knocking them out their senses, Saul, filled with the Spirit, repeatedly proclaimed Christ Jesus as the ‘Son of God’”.¹

2. **Verse 20 – “...he preached Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.”** – Jesus referred to Himself as the **“Son of God”** as we see recorded in **John 10:36** and **Matthew 26:63-64**. In **John 19:7**, the Jews said to Pontius Pilate, **“We have a law, and according to our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God”**. Why would His claiming to be the Son of God be considered blasphemy and be worthy of a death sentence? The Jewish leaders understood exactly what Jesus meant by the phrase **“Son of God.”** To be the Son of God is to be of the same nature as God. The claim to be of the same nature as God is to, in fact be God. This was blasphemy to the Jewish leaders. So, consider the courage of Saul (and the other apostles) as he goes into the synagogues proclaiming that Jesus was, and is God!

3. **Verse 21 – This “amazed” everyone who heard him proclaim the Gospel. This word “amazed” means to “cause someone to be so astounded as to be practically overwhelmed”**² The Greek verb is literally, **“they were beside themselves; they were struck out of their senses”**³ Think of the impact this must have had on people’s minds! This was a demonstration of the power of a life dramatically changed! Years later, Paul would write: **“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”** (II Corinthians 5:17). Paul experienced that verse long before he wrote it!

a. **“Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name...”** – Dr. Bob Utley states; **“This is a rare and intense word meaning to ravage, lay waste to, or totally destroy. It is found only here and in Gal. 1:13, 23 in the NT”**⁴

B. Verse 22 – “But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ.”

1. **“...increased all the more in strength...”** – A.T. Robertson states regarding this:

“Progressive increase in strength as opposition grew. Saul’s recantation stirred controversy and Saul grew in power...Christ, the dynamo of spiritual energy, was now pouring power (Acts 1:8) into Paul who is already filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:17).”⁵

2. **“...and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ.”** – The word **“confounded”** means; **“to pour together, to mix,’...to cause such astonishment as to bewilder and dismay”**⁶

a. So, the more he was challenged, the stronger and more able he became by the power of the Holy Spirit to refute, challenge and prove that Jesus was the Messiah!

“But Saul increased all the more in strength, and continued to confound *and* put to confusion the Jews who lived in Damascus by comparing *and* examining evidence *and* proving that Jesus is the Christ (the Messiah).” Acts 9:22 – Amplified Bible

¹Stanley M. Horton, *Acts: A Logion Press Commentary* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2001), 186.

²Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 312.

³Stanley D. Toussaint, "Acts," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 377.

⁴Robert James Utley, *Luke the Historian: The Book of Acts*, vol. Volume 3B, Study Guide Commentary Series (Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International, 2003), 126.

⁵A.T. Robertson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Vol. III, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1930), 123.

⁶Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 312.

C. Verses 23-25 – The Jews try to kill Saul.

1. Verse 23 – “Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him.” – Many scholars believe that this “many days” could have been a period of up to three years and this is when he returned to Damascus after going to Arabia (cf. Galatians 1:15-18).

The Jews then took counsel to kill him. It is the first act of persecution and suffering recorded in this wonderful life of suffering for Christ’s sake. He is starting with what the Lord had said, “for I will show him how great things he must suffer for my Name’s sake” (verse 16). But the plot was discovered by Saul. He knew himself in the hands of the Lord. That glorious Jehovah, whom He had seen, was His shield and He guarded His servant, as He still keeps His servants by His power. The plot was the work of Satan, who had become aroused on account of the great victory the Lord had achieved in translating the persecutor from the power of darkness into His own kingdom (Col. 1). He could not wrest him from Christ, so he would silence his testimony here; but this Satan could not do.⁷

2. Verses 24-25 – Somehow, Saul became aware of the plot to kill him and some of the other believers of the city helped him to escape. Paul mentions this in II Corinthians 11:32-33.

“Saul’s plans for persecuting Christians in Damascus took a strange turn; he had entered the city blind and left in a basket! Ironically *he* became the object of persecution.”⁸

D. Verses 26-30 – Saul goes to Jerusalem.

1. Verse 26 – **The disciples of Jerusalem were afraid of Saul and did not believe he was a true Christian.** – They had known and were, no doubt friends, with some of the very people Saul had imprisoned and seen put to death.

“The man who returned to Jerusalem was a changed man from the one who had set out three years before, ‘breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord’. News of the change must have preceded him to Jerusalem; but it was surely incredible... We can appreciate the Jerusalem disciples’ misgivings. If they admitted him to their society, might he not turn out to be an *agent provocateur*, exploiting their simple trustfulness to bring about their complete overthrow?”⁹

2. Verses 27-28 – Barnabas befriends Saul.

a. Verse 27 – **“But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles...”** – We were already introduced to Barnabas in 4:36-37. Stanley Toussaint writes; **“In Damascus Saul needed a friend, Ananias; in Jerusalem he needed another, Barnabas. He whose name means “Son of Encouragement” (4:36) proved to be that for Saul.”**¹⁰ After they shared his testimony with the Jerusalem believers, it seems they gained trust and he was able to be **“...coming in and going out” (verse 28)** from their midst.

“New Christians (especially those with tarnished reputations) need sponsors, people who will come alongside, encourage, teach, and introduce them to other believers. Find ways that you can become a Barnabas to new believers.”¹¹

3. Verse 29 – **“And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, but they attempted to kill him.”** Saul, not being moved by the threats of the past, still goes forward preaching the Gospel boldly (with confidence and courage) to some of the same people who had been preached to by Stephen (Chapter 7) and in raging anger, stoned him to death.

“As with Stephen’s message of the gospel, so it was with Saul’s – rousing the anger of the Hellenistic Jews until they ‘tried to kill him.’ Probably they considered him a traitor who did not need a trial.”¹²

4. Verse 30 – **“When the brethren found out, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus.”** – So Saul is helped again by fellow believers who helped him escape, this time, to his home town.

E. Verse 31 – Five things to make note of in this verse:

1. **The churches had peace** – The persecution calmed down for a season.
2. **The churches were edified** – They were being built up and strengthened in their faith.

3. The churches walked in the fear of the Lord – Their attitude was that of reverence of God. 4. The churches walked in the comfort of the Holy Spirit. (cf. John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). 5. The churches were multiplied!

⁷Arno C. Gaebelein, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Exposition* (New York: "Our Hope" Publication Office, 1912), 185.

⁸Stanley D. Toussaint, "Acts," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 377–378.

⁹F. F. Bruce, *Acts: Bible Study Commentary* (Nashville, TN; Bath, England: Kingsley Books, 2017), Ac 9:26–31.

¹⁰Stanley D. Toussaint, "Acts," 378.

¹¹*Life Application Study Bible*, (Wheaton, IL, Tyndale House Publishers, 1996), 1710.

¹²Horton, *Acts*, 189.