

**As God's people, we want to be guided by His Word and empowered by His Spirit to look more like Jesus. This Scripture Guide is based on this morning's passage to further equip you with what God's Word says.**

## **Week 2**

### **Acts 9:19-31**

Paul's extraordinary encounter with Jesus immediately transformed Paul's life and mission. Within the span of a few days he had gone from breathing out murderous threats against Jesus' followers (Acts 9:1) all the way to defending the truth of Jesus' Messiahship (9:20). It seems that his zeal for God was immediately redirected to new ends. He rapidly began learning the truth about Jesus was the long-prophesied Messiah according to the Scriptures. Jesus' words to Ananias show us the new story arc for Paul's life. He was now the Messiah's "chosen instrument who will suffer for His name" (9:15). The section discussed below shows how Jesus' plan for shaping Paul for his ultimate purpose would take a long time and a lot of hardship as it materialized.

**vv.19-22** After Paul's conversion he remained in Damascus with the disciples. He began teaching the Jewish people there, trying to prove to them the things of which he had been convinced. Elsewhere we see that his new theological convictions did not mean that he threw away his Jewish roots. In fact he saw that Jesus as Messiah was the fulfillment of all that belonged to the Jews "the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises, the patriarchs" (Rom 9:5).

Paul's ability to reason from the Old Testament Scriptures astounds his audience, and no one is able to refute him.<sup>1</sup> This, his first encounter with the Jewish synagogue after his conversion, is a shadow of what would come later in the book of Acts. Luke tells us that it becomes Paul's custom after entering any new city to first go proclaim the gospel in the synagogue and prove from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Son of God and Messiah (Acts 13:5, 15; 14:1; 17:2, 10, 17; 18:4; 19:8; 28:17). It seems that Paul sees the Jewish people as the first rightful recipients of the gospel proclamation (Rom 1:16), and that they are the ones who should be most ready to receive the fullness of God's promises to Abraham. Also, in Paul's later writings his earnest focus and desire to preach the gospel to his Hebrew kindred. In Romans, Paul reveals his "great sorrow and unceasing anguish" in his heart over Jewish unbelief (Rom 9:2-4).

**vv. 23-25** Paul's story takes a sharp turn at this point.<sup>2</sup> Luke does not directly mention the next handful of years of Paul's life, but more detail can be found by looking at Paul's own autobiographical information elsewhere. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul recounts the early years of his life after meeting Jesus. Soon after his conversion in Antioch, rather than going directly to Jerusalem to meet the apostles, he went away to Arabia for about 3 years (specifically the Nabatean Kingdom, which extended from the eastern side of Syria in the North to the Red Sea in the South).<sup>3</sup>

Paul does not tell us exactly why he goes there, and there's no indication for why Luke leaves this portion of Paul's life out of the story. However, commenters suppose that either he sought solitude and religious retreat or that he went to preach the gospel and was trained for ministry there. He returns to Damascus (Gal 1:17), and his time in the region ends when the Jews attempt to assassinate him. Both Luke and Paul parallel the account of his escape from Damascus by being lowered down the city wall in a basket (Acts 9:25; 2 Cor 11:33).

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<sup>1</sup> This is a parallel with Stephen who the Jewish leaders "could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking" Acts 6:10

<sup>2</sup> In verse 23, πληρόω literally means "fulfilled". The ESV paraphrases to read "when many days elapsed", but it also could be read, "when sufficient days had passed". Commenters suppose the time period was between 2-3 years.

<sup>3</sup> Bruce, F.F., p. 191, *The Book of the Acts* (New International Commentary on the New Testament), Eerdmans, June 30, 1988

**vv. 26-30** Paul arrives in Jerusalem immediately after his escape. At this point Luke and Paul parallel accounts again. Luke gives the additional detail of how Paul faced difficulty in trying to convince the disciples that he was genuinely changed and was a servant of Jesus just like they were. In verse 26, “attempted” (πειράζω) is present imperfect which indicates that he kept on “trying and trying” to prove himself and earn the trust of the fellowship. Luke tells us that no one trusted him except for Barnabas—described elsewhere as full of faith and filled with the Holy Spirit,” (11:24). Paul says that he came to visit Cephas (Peter) and James and then for 15 days (Gal 1:18). Bruce explains:

Paul's chief concern in this section of Galatians is to show that he received his gospel, and his commission to preach it, without human mediation— in particular, that he was in no way indebted to the Jerusalem authorities. He had started fulfilling his commission (in Arabia) before he had any contact with Jerusalem...<sup>4</sup>

Paul states that he "remained unknown in person to the churches of Judaea," (Gal 1:22) but that they had all heard of his former life and glorified God for His transforming power in Paul's life. While in Jerusalem he debated the Hellenist Jews, and like Stephen before (6:9) the reaction turned violent (9:29). Jesus himself comes and commands him to hastily leave Jerusalem (22:17-21). It seems like Paul protested since he thought his astounding change of allegiance was a persuasive asset to his gospel ministry. But Jesus foretells, “they will not accept your testimony about me... Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles” (22:21).

After only two weeks in town, the Apostles sent him away to Tarsus in Cilicia (Acts 9:30, Gal 1:21), where he had grown up (22:3). But from here, Luke and Paul are both silent for this fourteen year period of his life (Gal 2:1), and we cannot be entirely sure what he does while he is in Tarsus. It seems reasonable that his mission is not halted in any way—he simply may have kept on proclaiming the gospel just as he did before. But nothing is stated for certain by Luke or Paul. After fifteen years, Paul states that he then went back to Jerusalem to receive validation in his life's ministry thus far (Gal 2:2). At this point he receives a formal commissioning by the “pillar” apostles, Peter, James, and John, who extend the “right hand of fellowship” to him and commission him as a missionary to the Gentiles (Gal 2:9).

**v. 31** The section ends with Luke summarizing the church's growth throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria, and “walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied, (9:31). This sets the tone for the rest of the book of Acts.

## **Conclusion**

Now the spotlight has moved over Paul the new apostle and servant of Jesus Christ—appointed by Jesus Himself. From there, Paul's famous missionary journeys lasted about 15-17 years. It is noteworthy that of the 30 years of Paul's life after the Damascus road, the first half is obscured and unrecorded. Just like Paul's calling wasn't from man, but God, the timeframe of his life is God's and not man's. It was Jesus who first said to Ananias that Paul was to be a “chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.” Now nearly all of the rest of Luke's account of the early church is devoted to how Jesus uses Paul to accomplish that. Luke's account and Paul's own biographical story elsewhere also give detail to the second part of Jesus' prophesy about Paul to Ananias, “I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name,” (Acts 9:15; 2 Cor 11:25-29).

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<sup>4</sup> Bruce, F.F., p. 194, *The Book of the Acts* (New International Commentary on the New Testament), Eerdmans, June 30, 1988