

Acts 9:19-31 | Session 24 | Saul Preaches the Messiah in the Synagogues

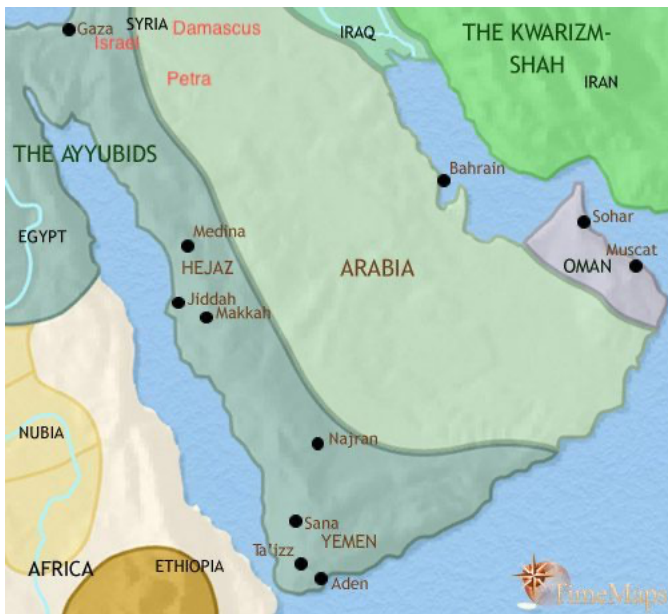
Verse 19-- **When he had received meat and was strengthened**, that is, *was nourished* from his fasting.

It is possible, that there is a period of up to three years between the middle of verse 19. Remember that verse numbers were not added to the Bible until the 1500's. I would propose verse nineteen ends at **he was strengthened**. Verse twenty begins with *Then was Saul certain days...* Sandwiched between verse nineteen is a period of up to three years. We will see why below.

Verse 20—

Verse 20 should begin with the second sentence in verse 19. **Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues...**

Chronology of the apostle's life is difficult because we only have bits and pieces to draw from. But let's try and build one by letting Scripture interpret Scripture. There are two places, other than the book of Acts where Paul recounts his Damascus experience, one is in Galatians 1:16,17.



After receiving the Holy Ghost (vs. 17) and being strengthened, through a casual reading, we might assume Saul **straightway** (immediately) began his ministry in Damascus. After meeting Jesus on the Damascus road, and after receiving the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands by Ananias, and his subsequent baptism, Saul left the city of Damascus for other parts of Arabia. According to Galatians, he *conferred* with no one (Galatians 1:16). Therefore, the **certain days with the disciples** must have been on his return visit. The Acts 9 account does not mention Saul's three years in Arabia.

The city of Damascus was also part of Arabia. Arabia was ruled by a king named Aretas who was a Nabatean whose capital was the city of Petra, located in Jordan today (See 2 Corinthians 11:32-33).

What was he doing in Arabia? We don't know. We might assume he was learning from Christ which would explain how he was able to so quickly begin teaching and preaching Christ in the synagogues in

Damascus. Upon his return to Damascus after three years (Galatians 1:17) he went directly to the **synagogues**. The fact that he went to **synagogues** is another indication there is only one group of believers at this point, the Jewish assembly, and not the church as we know it today. Saul's preaching was to make known that **Christ is the Son of God**. Newer translations say *Jesus* instead of **Christ**. More precise is **Christ** (Messiah), since that is what Saul was preaching. He certainly means *Jesus*, but the emphasis is that Messiah is the **Son of God**; the heir of all things, has all power, and is the resurrection and the life. We are not saved by believing Jesus is the **Son of God**, for even the devils believe that (See Luke 4:41). We are saved by belief in the completed work of Jesus Christ, his death, burial and resurrection (1 Corinthians 15: 3,4).

Verses 21, 22, 23—

But all that heard him were amazed. What was it about the preaching of Saul that **amazed** these Jews in Damascus? It wasn't the message of Messiah being Son of God, but that Saul had been converted to *the way* (9:2). After three years they are remembering



who this man was, **Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent.** The Greek wording for **came hither** describes a completed action in the past time. ESV mistranslates by using the present tense.

It doesn't appear those Jews in the synagogues believed the message he was preaching. Consequently, we don't read of any of the Damascenes believing, nor later of a church being founded there, like we will see in the people of Berea where they *searched the Scriptures to see if what Paul was teaching was true* (Acts 17). Instead, they couldn't get past their own surface feelings and emotions and they were **confounde** (confused), even though he **proved that this** (Jesus) **is the very Christ.**

And after many days were fulfilled. There are some who put the three years in Arabia here, but I think it fits better as stated above.

The result of their unbelief was that after **many days, the Jews took counsel to kill him.** The hunter has now become the hunted, and this is the beginning of Christ's prophecy about Saul in verse 16.

The word **Jews** here in the Greek is *ioudaios, Judeans*, maybe this refers to the religious leaders who perhaps had come to Damascus from Jerusalem (Judea)? Why would they have a desire to kill him? They may have thought, If Saul could be swayed by these zealots of *the way* (Acts 9:2), who else might get *infected*? So, **they watched the gates day and night to kill him.** **Saul**, however found out about the plot to kill him.

Verse 25—

There were some believers in Damascus. **The disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket.** Paul (Saul) recounts this event in 2 Corinthians 11:32-33 where in the context of that passage he lists this persecution last with all the sufferings he has endured.

Verse 26—

When Saul was come to Jerusalem. This was probably A.D. 37 or 38. Galatians 1:18 tells us that his purpose in going to Jerusalem was to *see Peter, and that he is only in the city for fifteen days.* **Assayed** is *attempted, or tried to find a way.* The word in Greek, is from the word *pirah* in which the word *pirate* comes from. *Pirah* is to pierce, so he is making a stab at trying to **to join himself to the disciples**, however **they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.**

Verse 27—

Fortunately, **Barnabas** comes on the scene. We first saw him in 4:36, and his name means the son of *one who comforts, or one who gives encouragement.* And **Barnabas declared to the apostles** Saul's Damascus road experience with Christ and how he had **preached boldly in Damascus in the name of Jesus.** That is still, the kingdom message is being preached by Saul, five years later.

Verses 28,29—

For fifteen days (Galatians 1:18) he **was with them coming in and going out**, that is he was with the apostles the entire time. We get a little more information in Galatians 1:18 where Paul says that he was only with two of the apostles for the fifteen days, Peter and James. And he was **boldly** speaking in the **name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians.** The Grecians were Jews who had adopted the Greek lifestyle. Perhaps these Grecians had moved too far away from their Hebrew roots, and Paul was trying to pull them back in? Whatever the dispute, it was enough that they wanted to **slay him.**

Verses 30,31—

Sent him forth to Tarsus, which was in *Cilicia*, this aligns with Galatians 1:21. He will not go back to Jerusalem for another fourteen years (Acts 15:23).

