

Acts 9:19b-25

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Saul immediately begins preaching in Damascus that Jesus is the Son of God and the Messiah. Everyone is amazed. They knew Saul beforehand as a persecutor of believers, and now he was a believer himself. Some of the Jews in Damascus plot to kill him for his betrayal, but he catches wind of this and escapes the city by night.

Just a few days after he has his eyes healed, and a few days after talking to the disciples in Damascus, including Ananias, Saul is in the synagogues preaching *Jesus* as the Messiah.

Now for several days Saul was with the disciples who were at Damascus, and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God."

There is a tenacity in Saul, seen through his rage against the church before Christ. Now that he has believed in Jesus and is called to ministry, the same tenacity manifests in promptly taking action on behalf of another cause: Jesus. He *began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues*, which is noteworthy. The main focus of the spread of the gospel at the moment is to inform the Jews about Jesus. The *synagogues* were places of worship for the Jews. Saul proclaims that Jesus of Nazareth, the famous teacher and miracle worker who was put to death, is alive. He *is the Son of God*. The promised Messiah finally came to Israel.

In Acts 2, Peter preached to the Jews in the temple, their primary place of worship in Jerusalem. He preached a message of repentance and restoration, that the Hebrew scriptures and prophecies had been fulfilled by Jesus and that the time of the Kingdom might come if Israel would receive its Messiah:

“But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time.”

(Acts 2:18-21)

Luke now presents Saul in the *synagogues*, the Jewish place of worship outside Jerusalem. Saul is also trying to draw the Jewish people to their Messiah, the *Son of God* who he saw in a vision on the road. Luke recorded Saul/Paul’s personal encounter with Jesus (Acts 9:3-6). This encounter qualifies Paul to be an apostle of Jesus. Now Luke presents the first of a number of parallels shown in his gospel between Peter and Paul, which also demonstrates Paul’s true authority as an apostle of Jesus. Peter and Paul both promptly began to preach about Jesus after receiving the Holy Spirit. Paul/Saul received the Holy Spirit from the laying on of hands by Ananias (Acts 9:17). Peter received the Holy Spirit in the upper room (Acts 2:4).

Saul's audience in Damascus seems more surprised than anything else: *All those hearing him continued to be amazed, and were saying, "Is this not he who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name, and who had come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?"*

This man is famous for hunting down believers in Jesus. He *destroyed those who called on the name* of Jesus of Nazareth. He did not merely chastise, he *destroyed*. He scattered the disciples *in Jerusalem* to the four winds. Didn't he *come here for the purpose of bringing* these Jesus-believers *bound before the chief priests*? Why is he one of them now? Is it a trap? Is it genuine? How can this be?

The men who accompanied Saul were likely still in Damascus with him. They were either temple guards or hired men to help with the arrests. They too would have seen that Saul had now become a believer in Jesus. Surely they were *amazed* as well, and added to the conversation concerning the about-face in Saul the Pharisee. Of course, they had also seen the light from heaven and heard the voice of Jesus without understanding it. They had seen Saul struck blind and now saw his sight and health restored. Perhaps they kept silent, but were no less *amazed*. It seems possible they too would come to faith in Jesus after all of this. It is also possible they became part of a plot to capture Saul and destroy him.

But Saul kept increasing in strength, no longer blind or abstaining from eating and drinking. His zeal was now directed toward preaching the name of Jesus, not persecuting it. Everything he said was *confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus*, not merely by his change of allegiance, but by how well he taught the message of the gospel. He *was confounding the Jews by proving that this Jesus is the Christ*.

How was Saul, this brand new believer, *confounding* and *proving that Jesus* was the Messiah? At this point it would seem that people would begin to believe that Saul's conversion was genuine.

He was a Pharisee, a Hebrew of Hebrews by his own description (Philippians 3:5), which means he knew the Bible. He probably had much of it memorized, and was closely familiar with its prophecies.

Saul describes his education and passion for the scriptures in his letter to the Galatians, "I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions" (Galatians 1:14).

He believed the Messiah was coming. He knew the Messiah was going to be:

- The second Adam, the Son crowned with the glory and honor of ruling over creation (Psalm 8; Romans 5:14; Hebrews 2:6-9).
- The second Moses, the Son and prophet who spoke the word of God directly to the people (Matthew 5-7; Deuteronomy 18:17-18; Acts 3:22-23, Hosea 11:1; Hebrews 3:3-6),
- The second Joseph, the second Son of the birthright whom his brothers rejected, but who became their savior (Genesis 37:23-24, 45:4-5), and

- The second Joshua, who will conquer the land for His people (Revelation 19:11-16), and
- The second David, who will rule as king on the throne of Israel forever (Matthew 21:9; Luke 1:32).

Just as Israel's first king Saul preceded David, now Saul of Tarsus will precede Jesus the Son of David. But Saul failed to recognize that Jesus was that person, the Son of David, until he met Him in person. And then he realized, this is Him, the Savior sent from God.

One of the main obstacles for the Pharisees during Jesus's ministry seemed to be the concept that God could become man (John 10:33). Once Saul was past that obstacle, he saw the truth. Now he is able to use all of his Biblical knowledge and understanding to completely confound everybody, *proving that Jesus is the Christ*. That Saul is *proving* infers that he is using the scripture to prove that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of David. This is similar to the episode of Jesus traveling with some disciples to the city of Emmaus; He showed them how the scriptures pointed to Him having to suffer, die, and rise again in order to be the Messiah (Luke 24:25-27). Perhaps Jesus also spoke to Saul in a similar manner, but Saul does not disclose that talk (2 Corinthians 12:2-4).

Earlier when Saul was healed of his blindness "there fell from his eyes something like scales" (v. 18), but there were also metaphorical scales falling from the eyes of his heart. Now Saul sees Jesus as the promised Messiah of the Old Testament. He sees how this man from Nazareth fulfilled what was foretold, how He suffered for the sins of the world (Psalm 22, Isaiah 53), and that He resurrected and was now in heaven with the Father. Now Saul is ready to proclaim and defend the gospel.

The curiosity of the once-enemy-now-believer Saul wore out quickly in *Damascus*. While this journey started with Saul persecuting others, he switches teams and is in trouble with his former co-persecutors. The *Jews* who were opposed to believers of Christ were frustrated that this Pharisee, who was supposed to come and snuff out these "heretics" had joined them! So *When many days had elapsed, the Jews plotted together to do away with him*, probably to capture him and kill him somewhere beyond the city, *but their plot became known to Saul*. Somehow *Saul* learned of the *plot*, though the author Luke does not tell us how. Perhaps some of those who accompanied him were sympathetic and informed him of the plot to kill him.

The Jewish enemies of Saul *were also watching the gates day and night so that they might put him to death*. It seems they knew that *Saul* had learned of their intentions to kill him. So they guarded his way out of the city, the *gates, day and night*. They are committed to destroying Saul, who was now seen as a traitor. But Saul's new friends, the *disciples in Damascus*, help him evade capture and live to preach another day. They *took Saul by night* and put him *in a large basket*. There was an *opening in the wall* which they knew of, which was unwatched, since the Jews only watched the city *gates*. The believers *let Saul down*, lowering him by rope in his *large basket*, and from there he was on the other side of the *wall*, safe for now. Just as Moses was saved in a basket and lived to lead Israel, Paul was saved in a basket and will live to lead the Gentiles to Jesus.

Biblical Text

Now for several days he was with the disciples who were at Damascus,²⁰ and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.”²¹ All those hearing him continued to be amazed, and were saying, “Is this not he who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name, and who had come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?”²² But Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this Jesus is the Christ.²³ When many days had elapsed, the Jews plotted together to do away with him,²⁴ but their plot became known to Saul. They were also watching the gates day and night so that they might put him to death;²⁵ but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a large basket.