

# A MINISTRY FOR HUNGRY SAINTS

UNDER THE EXALTED CHRIST, THE GOSPEL BEGINS TO SPREAD

# THE ACTS

† THE BOOK OF ACTS

## OF THE APOSTLES

*An overview of the Book of Acts, by Given O. Blakely*

### ACTS 5:31-32

*"Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey Him."*

"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)

### Lesson #43

### COMMENTARY ON: 9:20-31

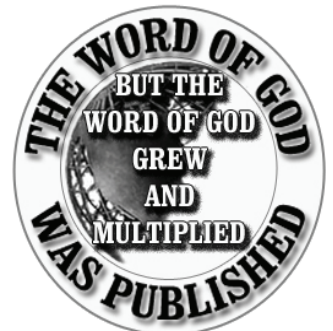
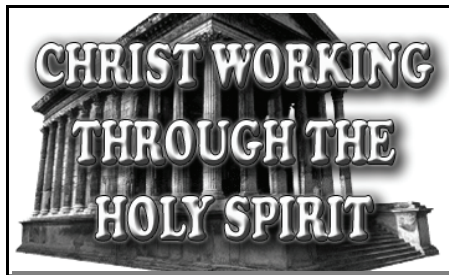
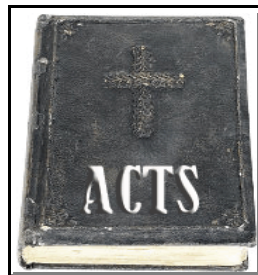
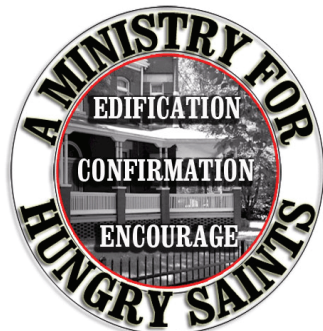
#### SAUL'S CONVERSION AND HIS INITIAL WORK

Having confronted Jesus, obeyed His word to wait in Damascus for further word on what he must do, hearing Ananias and being baptized into Christ, Saul continued for several days with the disciples. He also immediately began to preach Christ in the synagogues, a place where it was customary to allow devoted visitors to speak. He preached the very thing that he had vociferously denied just a few days earlier – namely that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. His knowledge of the Scriptures was now augmented, as it were, with spiritual understanding, as the light of God shined upon them from within his new heart and spirit. His powerful presentation caused amazement in all who heard him, for they knew of his prior life. His preaching also inflamed the anger of the Jews, who set out to kill him, who prior to this was held in high esteem among them. The disciples, however, came to Saul's aid, providing a most ingenious way of escape. Now, when he attempted to join the disciples in Jerusalem, they hesitated to receive him, requiring that Barnabas come to his aid, assuring the brethren there of the legitimacy of Saul's conversion.

### ACTS 17:26-27

*"And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us."*

" . . . and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

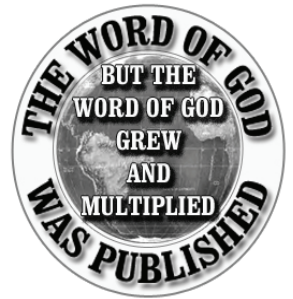


Since May, 1993, a ministry instituted for the encouragement of believers in Christ



## The Book of Acts

### Lesson Number 43



A MINISTRY INITIATED IN MAY 1993, AND DEDICATED TO STRENGTHENING THOSE WHO ARE IN CHRIST, BY BUILDING THEIR FAITH, ENHANCING THEIR JOY, AND STABILIZING THEIR HOPE, ENABLING THEM TO WORK OUT THEIR SALVATION WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING.

**TRANSLATION LEGEND:** ALT = Analytical-Literal Translation (2005), AMPLIFIED = Amplified Bible (1965), ASV = American Standard Version (1901), BBE=Bible in Basic English (1949), DRA = Douay-Rheims (1899), ERV = English Revised Version (1885), ESV = English Stand Version (2001), GNB = Good News (1966), GWN = God's Word (1995), IE = International English, ISV = International Standard Version (1967), JPS = Jewish Publication Society (1917), KJV = King James Version (1611), L.ITV = Literal Translation of the Bible ((1976), LIVING = Living Bible (1971), MKJV = Modern KJV (1962), MONTGOMERY = Montgomery's New Testament (2001), MRD = Peshitta-James Murdock Translation (1852), NAB = New American Bible (2002), NASB = New American Standard Bible (1977), NAU = New American Standard Bible (1995), NIB = New International Bible, NIV = New International Version (1984), NJB = New Jerusalem Bible (1985), NKJV = New King James Version (1979), NLT =New Living Translation (1996), NRSV = New Revised Standard Version (1989), PHILLIPS = J B Phillips New Testament (1962), PNT = BISHOP'S New Testament (1595), RSV = Revised Standard Version (1952), TNK = JPS Tanakj (1985), Webster = The Webster Bible (1833), WEYMOUTH = Weymouth's New Testament (1903), WILLIAMS = William's New Testament (1937), TYNDALE = Tyndale's Bible (1526), WYCLIFFE = Wycliffe New Testament (1382), YLT =Young's Literal Translation (1862).

----- Lexicon and Bible Translation Codes with Identification -----

**LEXICON LEGEND:** FRIEBERG = Friberg Lexicon, UBS = UBS Lexicon, LOUW-NIDA = Louw-Nida Lexicon, LIDDELL SCOTT = Liddell Scott Lexicon, THAYER = Thayer's Greek Lexicon, LEH = LEH Lexicon, GINGRICH = Gingrich Lexicon

THE INSPIRED RECORD OF HOW THE ENTHRONED CHRIST, BY MEANS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, WORKED THROUGH HIS HOLY APOSTLES AND GODLY MEN, TO SPREAD THE WORD OF THE GOSPEL THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE WORLD, AND TO BRING EDIFICATION AND STABILITY TO MEMBERS OF CHRIST'S BODY.

**DISCLAIMER:** The quoting of other translations is not to be taken as a condoning of them. My purpose is rather to show the remarkable diversity, and sometimes outright contradictions that exist among these various versions of Scripture. Our understanding of the Word of God ultimately depends upon our comprehension of the Lord Himself and His eternal purpose. Where this understanding is not present, we are shut up to scholasticism and conjecture, both of which are of the world, not of God.

# SAUL'S CONVERSION AND INITIAL WORK

“9:20 And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God. <sup>21</sup> But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests? <sup>22</sup> But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ. <sup>23</sup> And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him: <sup>24</sup> But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him. <sup>25</sup> Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket. <sup>26</sup> And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. <sup>27</sup> But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. <sup>28</sup> And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem. <sup>29</sup> And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him. <sup>30</sup> Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus. <sup>31</sup> Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.” (Acts 9:20-31)

## INTRODUCTION

Having confronted Jesus, obeyed His word to wait in Damascus for further word on what he must do, hearing Ananias and being baptized into Christ, Saul continued for several days with the disciples. These were now his people of preference – the very people against

whom he launched an aggressive persecution. It is evident that, having passed from death unto life, he had received the love of the brethren, which is a revealed confirmation of regeneration (John 13:35; 1 John 3:14). You will notice that there is a total absence of

philosophizing in Luke's account. He does not teach that believers **ought** to love one another, or report that they were exhorted to do so. Instead, he records the undeniable presence of this quality among the disciples. They preferred one another, and therefore spent quality time

## CONTENTS

- SAUL IMMEDIATELY PREACHED THAT JESUS IS THE SON OF GOD (9:20)
- A NOTICEABLE CHANGE (9:21)
- HE CONFOUNDED THE JEWS, PROVING THAT JESUS IS VERY CHRIST (9:22)
- THE JEWS TAKE COUNSEL TO KILL SAUL (9:23-24)
- SAUL IS DELIVERED BY THE DAMASCUS DISCIPLES (9:25)
- THE JERUSALEM DISCIPLES ARE AFRAID OF HIM (9:26)
- BARNABAS PERCEIVES AND TAKES UP SAUL'S CASE (9:27-28)
- SAUL SPEAKS BOLDLY AND DISPUTES AGAINST THE GRECIANS (9:29-30)
- A PERIOD OF REST FOR THE CHURCHES (9:31)
- CONCLUSION

together (Acts 1:14; 2:1,46; 4:24,31,32; 5:12; 9:19). **Within an institutional setting, assembling together and working together is an objective.** Within a spiritual environment it becomes a reality. The case before us is a powerful confirmation of that fact.

Saul also immediately began to preach Christ in the synagogues, a place where it was customary to allow devoted visitors to speak. This practice is confirmed by the record of *“Paul and his company”* attending a synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia. Of that occasion it is written, *“And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on”* (Acts 13:15).

### A NOTEWORTHY CIRCUMSTANCE

I mention this circumstance to emphasize the significant changes that have taken place in the normal *Christian* gathering. Under the administration of God Himself, and within the framework

of His commandments and ordinances, gatherings were structured around prayer and teaching. There was a commitment to the Scriptures themselves – a practice to which Acts 15:21 refers: *“For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day”* (Acts 15:21). This was the kind of gathering in which Jesus first preached to the people, reading and expounding Isaiah’s prophecy of the Messiah (Luke 4:16–27). That text also informs us that Jesus did this *“as His custom was”* (Lk 4:16).

The critical distinction of those early gatherings, as compared to the average *church gathering* of our time is that learning and familiarity with the Word of God were fundamental, having the priority. In our day, there is more of a bent to entertainment and things that center in the people themselves. Those with insight, or who have a word to deliver, are of relatively little or no significance, and no place is made for them to speak. **Without laboring the matter to the point of distraction, I will say that it is not likely that any significant move of God will ever occur in such a setting.** Wherever there is a gravitation to any form of spiritual lifelessness – whether it is in the form of flesh-pleasing entertainment, or religious tradition – there is a corresponding forfeiture of Divine power and revelation. I do not believe it is possible to avoid this consequence. It is certain that wherever the love of the truth is absent, it is not possible for the truth to be known (2 Thess 2:10-12); and where the truth is not known, it is not possible to be made free (John 8:32,36).

Once again, I am drawing attention to these things to emphasize why the truth of Christ spread so rapidly and effectively during the early days of the church. **The remarkable dissemination and embrace of the Gospel, as recorded in the book of Acts, was not owing to a unique impartation of power intended only for the launching of the Kingdom of God.** Rather, the purity of the message, and the holiness of the people provided the environment in which the Lord distributed the blessing. This is something that cannot be achieved by education, organization, or institutionalism. It is still true, as the

Lord declared to Zerubbabel the builder, *“Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit, saith the LORD of hosts”* (Zech 4:6).

### A PROPER ENVIRONMENT IS REQUIRED

Anywhere and everywhere some form of revelation or spiritual renewal took place in Scripture, both the hearts and the minds of the people were engaged, being **focused on what was being said.** This is precisely why the church is solemnly admonished, *“Let all things be done unto edifying”* (1 Cor 14:26). **Edification is the appointed process through which spiritual solidity and maturity are developed.** It is a means through which both the hearts and minds of the people are cultured spiritually, so that they can both think and feel in concert with Deity. Wherever this is not taking place, there really is no purpose for calling for a gathering of the people of God. What is more, there is no place among the saints for religious professionals, or men whose minds are saturated with the wisdom of this world.

### A TYPICAL SYNAGOGUE MEETING

*“The order of the synagogue service was first the prayers, read by the *Sheliach*, or angel of the synagogue, the people standing. Then came the reading of the Law in Hebrew by the reader, and the interpretation by the interpreter, who, outside of Judaea, generally used the version of the LXX (Septuagint). This reading, or lesson, was called the *Parashah*. Next came the reading and interpreting of the prophets, called the *Haphtorah*, either by the regular reader or by anyone invited by the ruler of the synagogue (Luke 4:16,17). Then came the *Midrash*, the exposition or sermon, which Paul undertook at the invitation of the ruler of the synagogue. Our Lord at Nazareth seems to have delivered the *Midrash* sitting (Luke 4:20); here St. Paul stands (ver. 16).”* PULPIT COMMENTARY

*“The rulers of the synagogue: Those were persons who had the general charge of the synagogue and its service, to keep everything in order, and to direct the affairs of public worship. They designated the individuals who were to read the Law; and called on those whom they pleased to address the people, and had the power also of inflicting punishment, and of excommunicating, etc.”* (Schleusner), Mark 5:22,35,36,38; Luke 8:49; 13:14; Acts 18:8,17. ALBERT BARNES

COMMENTS ON ACTS 13:15

A setting that allows for the entrance of such imposters would be more suitable for Saul the Pharisee, than for Saul the disciple. In the average church setting of our time, I seriously doubt that Saul would be asked to speak.

In this text, Paul's preaching also inflamed the anger of the Jews, who set out to kill him, who prior to this was held

in high esteem among them. The disciples, however, came to Saul's aid, providing a most ingenious way of escape. Now, when he attempted to join the disciples in Jerusalem, they hesitated to receive him, requiring that Barnabas come to his aid, assuring the brethren there of the legitimacy of Saul's conversion.

Keep in mind that we are being exposed to real spiritual life, and of its impact upon both those who believe and those who do not. This is not the outworking of a humanly-devised strategy, but is the expression of the "newness of life" common to all believers. This is the newness of life into which every believer is raised, and is intended to be the environment of life.

## SAUL IMMEDIATELY PREACHED THAT JESUS IS THE SON OF GOD

<sup>46:20</sup> **And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.**"

When once the life of Jesus is within a person, it will be made manifest in their "mortal flesh." As it is written, "For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh" (2 Cor 4:11). It is true that there is a certain obligation placed upon those with spiritual life to express it. This is seen in exhortations such as the following:

⇒ "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Mat 5:16).

⇒ "And grieve not the Holy Spirit of

received in the Lord, that thou fulfill it" (Col 4:17).

⇒ "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man" (Col 4:6).

Valid and profitable spiritual expression springs from one's faith. As it is written, "We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak" (2 Cor 4:13). Now, having believed, Saul begins to "preach." It will be interesting to learn about his focus.

### HE PREACHED CHRIST IN THE SYNAGOGUES

"And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues . . ." Other

things to note in this text.

⇒ **THE IMMEDIACY OF SAUL'S ACTION** – "straightway," or immediately. The nature of the responses recorded in Acts, whether from God for judgment or blessing, or from men themselves, is encapsulated in words like "straightway" (5:10; 9:20; 16:33), and "immediately" (3:7; 5:10; 9:18,34; 10:33; 11:11; 12:23; 13:11; 16:10,26; 17:10). Saul wasted no time in expressing his faith. **This is the manner in which faith responds.** It is fear, doubt, and unbelief that cause men to be retarded in their responses – and none of those conditions is acceptable before the Lord.

⇒ **HIS ACTIVITY** – "he preached." To "preach" is to proclaim, declare, announce, publish, or herald. The Greek word employed here is ἐκήρυσσεν which is the indicative imperfect active 3rd person singular form of the verb form of κηρύσσω, which is used to express a public proclamation of an existing person, or event that has occurred. The language structure, or tense, of the term means the following:

1– "Indicative" – pointing to a specific matter in an exact manner.

2– "Imperfect" – a continual proclamation, as compared to making a single statement.

3– "Active" – that the action described is one in which Saul was continually engaged.

4– "3rd person" – Saul was

**It is possible for preaching to be much like a blind man wandering about in a field, stumbling here and there in a vain attempt to find something. In Saul's case, it was a continual focus, and the proclamation of what already existed, which is a definition of truth, or reality.**

God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption" (Eph 4:30).

⇒ "Quench not the Spirit" (1 Thess 5:19).

⇒ "And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast

versions read, "immediately he began to proclaim," <sup>NASB</sup> "immediately he proclaimed," <sup>NRSV</sup> "immediately began to spread the word," <sup>GWN</sup> "forthwith he announced Jesus," <sup>MRD</sup> and "Without delay he proclaimed Jesus." <sup>PHILLIPS</sup>

There are several significant

preaching about another person, not himself or his own experience.

5- **"Singular"** – The Person Saul preached was the sole object of his exposition. He did not start with this subject to launch himself into a theme perceived to be more relevant.

While this is admittedly a technicality, it does serve to accent that proper preaching must have an undeniable focus. It is possible for preaching to be much like a blind man wandering about in a field, stumbling here and there in a vain attempt to find something. In Saul's case, it was a continual focus, and the proclamation of what already existed, which is a definition of truth, or reality.

⇨ **THE SUBJECT OF PROCLAMATION** – "Christ." Saul was proclaiming a Person. Already in the book of Acts the apostles are described as ceasing not to "teach and preach **Jesus Christ**" (Acts 5:42). Philip is said to have gone down to the city of Samaria "and preached **Christ** unto them" (Acts 8:5). Now, Saul is said to have "preached **Christ**." The people to whom he preached was not his theme, and their needs were not the subject of his exposition. It is ever true that until a person can truly "preach Christ," he is not, by scriptural definition, a "preacher" (Rom 10:14).

⇨ **THE PLACE OF PROCLAMATION** – "the synagogues." It is good to consider where Saul carried out his preaching. It was "in the synagogues." **The Savior Himself** was noted for teaching and preaching in the synagogues (Matt 4:23; 9:35; 12:9; 13:54; Mk 1:21,39; 3:1; 6:2; Lk 4:15,16,33,38,44; 6:6; 13:10; John 6:59; 18:20). **The apostles and others** also were noted for preaching in the synagogues (Acts 6:9; 9:20; 13:5,14-15,42; 14:1; 17:1,10,17; 18:4,19,26; 19:8). Frequently **those who believed on Jesus** were also said to have been associated with the synagogues (Acts 9:2; 18:26; 22:19; 26:11). **Here was a place where those of sober mind**

were apt to be found. It was a place where the Scriptures were read and expounded, and where devotion was more common. It really is no marvel that Saul began preaching in the synagogues of the city.

**HE IS THE SON OF GOD**

"... that He is the Son of God."

Other versions read, "preaching Jesus as the Son of God,"<sup>BBE</sup> and "saying, He is indeed the Son of God!"<sup>NLT</sup>

The idea is that Saul preached Jesus as the Son of God. **He did not proclaim Him as the answer to the perceived needs of men, or the means of realizing personal ambitions.** He did not

- ⇨ He is "the wisdom of God" (1 Cor 1:24).
- ⇨ He is "the power of God" (1 Cor 1:24).
- ⇨ He is "the Holy One of God" (Mk 1:24).
- ⇨ He is "the Chosen of God" (Lk 23:35; 1 Pet 2:4).
- ⇨ He is "the Bread of God" (John 6:33).
- ⇨ He is "He which is of God" (John 6:46).

**The primary association of Jesus Christ is the Father Himself – not humanity. He is the Savior of men, to be sure. However He is primarily the Son of God. It is what He is to God that makes Him effective in what He is to men.**

deliver a message that represented Jesus Christ as sanctioning a specific organization, or the way to recover from personal and social setbacks. **The primary association of Jesus Christ is the Father Himself – not humanity.** He is the Savior of men, to be sure. However He is primarily the Son of God. It is what He is to God that makes Him effective in what He is to men.

- ⇨ He is "the Son of God" (Matt 8:29; Rom 1:4; Eph 4:13; Heb 4:141 John 3:8; 5:5,10,12,13,20; Rev 2:18).
- ⇨ He is "the Son of the living God" (Matt 16:16).
- ⇨ He is the "Son of the Most High God" (Mk 5:7).
- ⇨ He is "the Christ of God" (Lk 9:20).
- ⇨ He is "the Son of the Blessed" (Mk 14:61).
- ⇨ He is "the Lamb of God" (John 1:29,36).

- ⇨ He is "the Image of God" (2 Cor 4:4).
- ⇨ He is "Word of God" (Rev 19:13)
- ⇨ The "only Begotten of the Father" (John 1:14; 3:16,18).
- ⇨ He is described as One who is "in the bosom of the Father" (John 1:18).
- ⇨ He is "the Son of the Father" (2 John 1:3).
- ⇨ Concerning His relationship to God the Father, He is referred to as "His Son" (Acts 3:13,26; Rom 1:3,9; 5:10; 8:29; 1 Cor 1:9; Gal 1:16; 4:4; 1 Thess 1:10; Heb 1:2; 1 John 1:3,7; 3:23; 4:10; 5:9,10,11,20).
- ⇨ He is referred to as God's "Beloved Son" (Matt 3:17; 17:5; Mk 1:11; Lk 9:35).
- ⇨ It is affirmed that **only the Father** knows the identity of the Son, and **only the Son** knows the identity of the Father. Any knowledge of God

that is realized by men comes through the Son alone (Matt 11:27).

- ⇒ The **Father** “*loves the Son,*” and has given all things into His hand (John 3:35).
- ⇒ Jesus did not work independently of God, “*Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do: for what things soever He doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise*” (John 5:19).

**It is obvious that when Jesus is preached as the Son of God, the relation of the Son to the Father is primary.** The private concerns of humanity, however significant they may appear, are not what the work of Jesus is about. The professed church has not done well in making this clear to the people – something for which it is responsible, seeing it is the “*pillar and ground of the truth*” (1 Tim 3:15).

Saul preached the very thing

that he had vociferously denied just a few days earlier – namely that **Jesus Christ is the Son of God.** This sudden shift in his thinking was not the result of a lengthy period of training. Rather, his knowledge of the Scriptures had now been augmented, as it were, with spiritual understanding, as the light of God shined upon them from within his new heart and spirit. **He now perceived that Jesus is really the Subject of Scripture** (John 5:39), and that “*the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy*” (Rev 19:10).

### A NOTICEABLE CHANGE

*“<sup>21</sup> But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?”*

It is to be understood that a

of a new birth establishes that a fundamental change in the character of the individual is required. That is something that can only be accomplished through the Holy Spirit. Therefore, those who are “*born again*” are said to have been “*born of the Spirit*” (John 3:6,8), and born of “*incorruptible seed*” (1 Pet 1:23).

heard Saul could in no way account for the drastic change that had taken place in him. There simply was no natural explanation for the radical alteration of his speech and manners. Here is a classic example of the fulfillment of this word: “*I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent*” (1 Cor 1:19; Isa 29:14). This is the manner of Divine working. **Men are not able to account for it by natural reasoning, or by comparing it to the wisdom and ways of this world.** It is not that God merely does things on a grand scale, so that it is remarkable, yet can be explained by appealing to the laws of nature and the natural aptitudes of men. Apart from Divine power, there is no explanation for what the Lord does.

**This is the manner of Divine working. Men are not able to account for it by natural reasoning, or by comparing it to the wisdom and ways of this world. It is not that God merely does things on a grand scale, so that it is remarkable, yet can be explained by appealing to the laws of nature and the natural aptitudes of men. Apart from Divine power, there is no explanation for what the Lord does.**

moral change that is not confirmed by appearance is really no change at all. In our time, when a hearty effort is being made to blend *Christianity* with “*this present evil world*” (Gal 1:5), the necessity for such a *change* is not being proclaimed. However, Jesus clarified the absolute necessity of change when He said to Nicodemus, “*Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God,*” and “*Ye must be born again*” (John 3:3,7). The use of the expression “*born again*” confirms that the mere adoption of new habits is not intended. **The requirement**

#### ALL THAT HEARD HIM WERE AMAZED

“*But all that heard him were amazed . . .*” Other versions read, “*continued to be amazed,*” <sup>NASB</sup> “*astonished,*” <sup>NIV</sup> “*full of wonder,*” <sup>BBE</sup> “*astounded,*” <sup>CSB</sup> and “*surprised.*” <sup>IE</sup>

The word “*amazed*” is translated from a word that means “*to throw out of position . . . throw one out of his mind, drive one out of his senses,*” <sup>THAYER</sup> “*to be amazed beyond comprehension confuse, astound, amaze,*” <sup>FRIBERG</sup> and “*to be amazed beyond comprehension confuse, astound, amaze.*” <sup>LOUW-NIDA</sup> **The idea is that those who**

Right here we must come to grips with the kind of things for which God is given purported praise in our day. **Too often men give credit to God for things the world can account for using mundane explanations.** God is not truly exalted by crediting Him for things that are perceived as quite doable apart from Him. It is not that God is never in such things – like gradual recoveries from debilitating illnesses, changes in weather patterns, financial well-being, etc. The point is that the saints, when giving public praise to God, ought to draw attention to things that **cannot** be accounted for on a worldly level. That is a matter of conducting ourselves wisely before men.

**IS NOT THIS HE?**

“... and said: *Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?*”

Saul’s powerful presentation caused amazement in all who heard him, for they knew of his prior life. They even knew why he had planned to come to that

area. They did not know what had happened to him on the way, or of the ordained encounter he had with Ananias. However, it was clear that the man speaking in their synagogue differed radically from the one who was reported to be coming to their city and synagogues to arrest and bind both men and women who were believers in Christ.

There is something else here

that is noteworthy. It was apparently not unusual for believers to be among those meeting regularly in the Jewish synagogue on the Sabbath day. It also appears that they were not always expelled from the synagogue. Neither is there any suggestion that the believers in any way compromised their faith, as some had done in Jerusalem during the ministry of Jesus (John 9:22; 12:42-43).

**HE CONFOUNDED THE JEWS, PROVING THAT JESUS IS VERY CHRIST**

*“<sup>22</sup> But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.”*

**BUT**

“But . . .” Other versions read, “Yet,” NIV “And,” YLT and “however.” WEYMOUTH This word is translated from the Greek conjunction δὲ, which has the following lexical meaning: “universally, by way of opposition and distinction; it is added to statements opposed to a preceding statement,” THAYER and “to emphasize contrast.” FRIBERG

This small word introduces the next clause, **which contrasts sharply with what has just been said**. Those who heard Saul speak were thrown out of their wits by the stark contrast between who Saul was prior to this, and what he now appeared to be. However, what they were beholding was a **beginning** of an **continual** change. The fact of the matter was that the alteration in Saul of Tarsus was an **ongoing** one. Furthermore, that uninterrupted change was not impacted at all by their response.

**SAUL INCREASED IN STRENGTH**

“... Saul increased the more in strength . . .” Other versions read, “increased all the more in strength,” NKJV “kept increasing in strength,” NASB “grew more and more powerful,” NIV “become increasingly more powerful,” NRSV “went on increasing in power,” BBE “was being filled more and more with power,” CJB “grew more capable,” CSB “was the more strengthened,” MRD “Saul’s power increased steadily,” NJB “Saul’s preaching became more and more powerful,” NLT

“was still more strengthened,” YLT “became more and more fervent in preaching,” LIVING “gained more and more influence,” WEYMOUTH “grew stronger and stronger,” WILLIAMS “went on from strength to strength,” PHILLIPS “All the more was being empowered,” ALT and “was more filled with power.” LITV

While those who heard Saul were confounded at the remarkable change in him, **he himself was increasing in strength more and more**.

Once again, we are being exposed to the manner of the Kingdom. Isaiah prophesied that the kingdom placed upon the shoulder of the Messiah would be noted for an “increase” that would never end (Isa 9:6-7). Daniel also prophesied of this Kingdom trait (Dan 2:44-45).



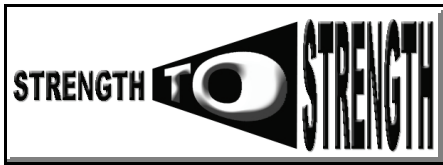
The Scriptures accent at least three areas in which continual change is realized by those who are living by faith.

⇒ **FAITH**. The word of the Gospel announces that faith is progressive in nature, advancing on and on as the justified ones live by it. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ:

for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed **from faith to faith**: as it is written, *The just shall live by faith*” (Rom 1:16-17). The phrase “from faith to faith” indicates that **it is the nature of spiritual life to promote an increase in faith itself**, which is the means through which all spiritual growth is realized. That is why is it written that “*the just shall live by faith.*” **There is no such thing as a static, inactive, or non-growing faith**. When faith does not increase (Lk 17:5) or grow (2 Thess 1:3), it at once begins to wane. Those in such a condition are said to believe only “for a while” (Lk 8:13). Those who keep the faith, on the other hand, experience the advancement of faith to a greater degree or measure.



⇒ **STRENGTH**. The Psalmist also declared increase to be the nature of those who, in redemption, would appear before God. “*They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God*” (Psa 84:7). Again, this progression is from one degree of strength to a greater degree of strength.



⇒ **GLORY.** The transformation of the individual takes place in stages. In these stages, the Holy Spirit changes the believer from one increasing stage of glory to another. This is done as we behold the glory of the Lord. *“But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord”* (2 Cor 3:18). Here, “glory” refers to the image of Christ into which believers are being transformed. This is done by means of spiritual growth in which they are being more and more conformed to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29).



The fact that Saul continued to increase in strength confirms that the processes to which I have just referred were taking place within him. This is the Kingdom norm – and it was all taking place within the arena of conflict and opposition.

### HE CONFOUNDED THE JEWS

*“ . . . and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus . . . ”* Other versions read, *“baffled the Jews,”* <sup>NIV</sup> *“the Jews . . . were not able to give answers to the arguments,”* <sup>BBE</sup> *“creating an uproar among the Jews,”* <sup>CJB</sup> *“confused the Jews,”* <sup>GWN</sup> *“causing consternation among the Jews,”* <sup>NET</sup> *“couldn’t refute his proofs,”* <sup>NLT</sup> *“couldn’t withstand his proofs,”* <sup>LIVING</sup> *“didn’t know how to answer him,”* <sup>IE</sup> *“bewildered them,”* <sup>WEYMOUTH</sup> *“continued to confound and put to confusion,”* <sup>AMPLIFIED</sup> and *“reducing to confusion.”* <sup>PHILLIPS</sup>

Saul was not spouting philosophy, or resorting to mere human logic. **He was reasoning out of the Scriptures – the writings of Moses and**

**the Prophets.** As an excelling young Pharisee, who was the *“son of a Pharisee,”* He had been a student of the Scriptures (Acts 23:6; 26:5; Gal 1:14; Phil 3:5-6). Neither, indeed, was he merely relating his experience on the road to Damascus. We know from the words that follow that he was mightily wielding the *“sword of the Spirit”* (Eph 6:17).

There is no substitute for a knowledge of the Scriptures. Those who have little knowledge and understanding of Scripture are, by virtue of that ignorance, disqualified from any extensive involvement in preaching or teaching. Those who labor in the vineyard of the Lord are described as workman who are *“handling accurately the word of truth”* <sup>NASB</sup> (2 Tim 2:15). In his various admonitions to Timothy, Paul mentioned that he had known the Scriptures *“from childhood”* <sup>NKJV</sup> (2 Tim 3:15). It was no doubt the same with Saul, who was the *“son of a Pharisee”* (Acts 23:6).

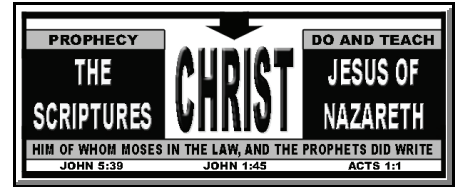
The point is that when light flooded the heart of Saul, it sanctified the knowledge of the Scriptures that he already possessed. That is why he was able to confound the Jews with irrefutable arguments concerning Christ Jesus – something that could not have been done by a person lacking an extensive knowledge of the Word of God.

### PROVING THAT JESUS WAS VERY CHRIST

*“ . . . proving that this is very Christ.”* Other versions read, *“proving that this Jesus is the Christ,”* <sup>NIV</sup> *“proving that Jesus was the Messiah,”* <sup>NRSV</sup> *“he made it clear,”* <sup>BBE</sup> *“with his proofs,”* <sup>CJB</sup> *“he demonstrated,”* <sup>MRD</sup> and *“by comparing and examining evidence and proving.”* <sup>AMPLIFIED</sup>

The word *“proving”* comes from the Greek word *συμβιβάζω* which has the following lexical meaning: *“to cause to coalesce, to join together, put together . . . to put together in one’s mind,”* <sup>THAYER</sup> *“strictly cause to stand together . . . intellectually prove conclusively,”* <sup>FRIEBERG</sup> and *“to bring together, to cause to be a unit.”* <sup>LOUW-NIDA</sup>

Saul’s proofs were developed by correlating what Jesus did and taught with what the Scriptures had foretold of the coming Messiah. That is the only way



Jesus could be confirmed to be *“very Christ,”* or *“THE Christ.”* Saul brought the Scriptures and revealed Person of Jesus together, confirming they were perfectly correlated with one another. Jesus Himself said of the Scriptures, *“they are they which testify of Me”* (John 5:39). When Philip found Nathanael, he said of Jesus, *“We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph”* (John 1:45). When Luke introduced this book to Theophilus, he said of his Gospel, *“The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach”* (Acts 1:1). **That record of what Jesus did and taught was in unwavering agreement with what Moses and the prophets said of the coming Messiah.**

Now, Saul of Tarsus, by the grace of God (1 Cor 15:10), has seen this also. He therefore takes the Jewish Scriptures (Moses and the Prophets), and matches them perfectly with what Jesus did and taught.

This is also how Jesus began His own ministry among men. In His hometown synagogue, He read a Messianic prophecy from the book of Isaiah, declaring that it was fulfilled that day in the ears of those who heard Him (Lk 4:16-21). Peter also did the same on the day of Pentecost, citing Jesus’ fulfillment of the prophecies of Moses, Joel and David, as well as the promise God made to David (Acts 2:16-21, 25-36). Later Peter told the people that *“all the prophets from Samuel”* had foretold the days of Jesus (Acts 3:24), and that Jesus was the Seed God promised to Abraham (Acts 3:25-26). Peter also told the household of Cornelius that *“all the prophets”* gave witness to Jesus Christ (Acts 10:43). Later, Paul would confess that in preaching Christ he said *“none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come”* (Acts 26:22). And, when he was incarcerated in the Gentile city of Rome, it

is written that he “expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening” (Acts 28:23).

Paul also wrote to the Romans, testifying to the manner in which he established them by “the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the

prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith” (Rom 16:25-26).

The modern Gentile church has, for the most part, obscured the writings of Moses and the Prophets concerning “the Christ.” It has substituted “another Jesus” (2 Cor 11:4) of whom Moses and the prophets did not write. Now Jesus is associated with the needs and desires of

the people as they are defined by men. Now he is perceived as a marriage-mender, drug-deliverer, prosperity-provider, career-conferrer, and success-supplier. He is being presented as the answer to self-perceived problems, and the means through which one’s dreams are brought to fruition. **However, this is not the kind of “Christ,” or Messiah, that was foretold in the Scriptures.** Therefore, it is not even remotely possible that such is the Savior of the world (1 John 4:14).

**THE JEWS TAKE COUNSEL TO KILL PAUL**

“<sup>23</sup> And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him: <sup>24</sup> But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him.”

The extent and duration of Saul’s teaching confirms how much he had been given to see – and there would be much more revelation given to him.

We are not sure of the precise

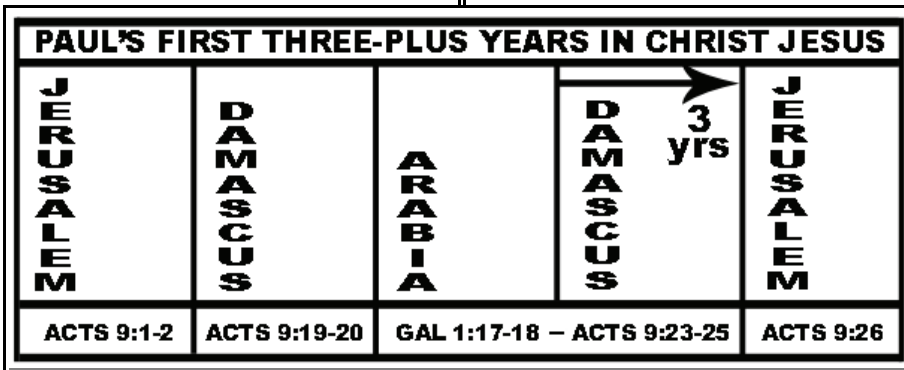
Jesus to him, he states, “But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb, and called me by his grace, To reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him

events of our text took place after he had returned from Arabia. **I am placing all of these events prior to the time Saul spent in Arabia.** It seems to me that this best suits the record Luke is delivering, which has primarily to do with the events immediately following Saul’s apprehension by Jesus. However, this is not something concerning which I will be contentious.

**THE JEWS TOOK COUNSEL**

“And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him . . .” Other versions read, “after some time had passed,”<sup>NRSV</sup> “after some days,”<sup>BBE</sup> “later,”<sup>GWN</sup> “after a long time,”<sup>NAB</sup> “after a good while,”<sup>TNT</sup> “at length,”<sup>WEYMOUTH</sup> “after several days,”<sup>WILLIAMS</sup> and “after considerable time had lapsed.”<sup>AMPLIFIED</sup>

The expression “many days” lends itself to the notion that Luke is speaking of a period of twenty-four hours, not a small cluster of years, or even months. The word “many” is translated from the Greek word *ικαναί*, which means “Reaching to, attaining to, and sufficient,”<sup>THAYER</sup> and “an implied measurement that reaches a certain stage.”<sup>FRIBERG</sup> The word “days” is translated from the Greek word *ἡμέραι*, which means “the natural day, between sunrise and sunset . . . and the civil day, or space of twenty-four hours.”<sup>THAYER</sup> The emphasis, therefore, is not placed on a specific number of days. **Rather, it highlights an unspecified number of days during which the patience of the Jews ran out.** While it is conceivable that this could include the period of time Saul



time that this circumstance took place. On the surface, it appears to have taken place within several days from the commencement of his preaching in the synagogue. However, the expression “many days” might very well refer to a rather lengthy period. If this is the case, it could refer to the second time he went to Damascus, after he had spent an unspecified period of time in Arabia. Paul refers to this time in his letter to the Galatians. Following the revelation of

fifteen days” (Gal 1:15-18).

Luke omits the time Saul spent in Arabia, saying only that it was after he first entered Damascus. It was also before he went to Jerusalem. He also states that he returned to Damascus after spending an unspecified period of time in Arabia. Then, after three years, he went up to Jerusalem. Some assume that Saul went to Arabia after the events of our text. Others are convinced that the

spent in Arabia, I do not consider it likely. The initial time Saul spent in the synagogues, immediately following his time with Ananias, was given to confounding the Jews. It is this bewilderment that provoked the Jews to take counsel to kill Saul.

This is precisely the same response that the Jews in the synagogue of the Libertines had toward Stephen. They *“were unable to resist the wisdom and spirit by which he spake.”* They therefore took counsel to kill him also, and did the same after a brief period of time (Acts 7:8-15, 58-59). Add to this the fact that the Jews reacted similarly to the Lord Jesus Himself after His very first sermon among them (Lk 4:28-29). Unbelieving Jews were not noted for their tolerance of the proclamation of Jesus. I do not know what would lead a person to believe they endured two extended sessions of Saul’s preaching – one before he went into Arabia, and one afterward. I therefore choose to believe that this record precedes Saul’s trip into Arabia.

It ought to be noted that time was given for these Jews to receive the love of the truth. However, they did not receive it, but chose rather to hold on to their cherished traditions.

#### IT WAS KNOWN OF SAUL

<sup>24</sup> *“But their laying await was known of Saul . . .”* Other versions read, *“their plot became known to Saul,”* <sup>NKJV</sup> *“Saul learned of their plan,”* <sup>NIV</sup> *“Saul got knowledge of their design,”* <sup>BBE</sup> *“Saul was told about their plot,”* <sup>GWN</sup> *“but news of it reached Saul,”* <sup>NJB</sup> *“but information of their intention was given to him,”* <sup>WEYMOUTH</sup> and *“the knowledge of their plot was made known to Saul.”* <sup>AMPLIFIED</sup>

Here again we see the closeness of the disciples, as well as their alertness to the circumstances. People who are all wrapped up in themselves are not aware of imminent danger, but blunder through life like brute beasts, falling needlessly into pits they could have avoided.

But it was not so among the disciples in Damascus. **Even though Saul**

**was a new convert, yet the believers were drawn to him, quickly recognizing the grace that had been given to him.** Consequently, they apprised him of the plots that were being made against him.

#### THEY WATCHED THE GATES

*“And they watched the gates day and night to kill him.”* Other versions read, *“they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him,”* <sup>NIV</sup> *“And they kept watch day and night on the roads*

**This is the kind of thing that was taking place in our text. While some might well conjecture that certain members of the synagogue overheard the plans of Saul’s enemies, that does not get to the source of the matter. This was actually the reigning Christ delivering Saul from the people, just as He promised He would do**

*out of the town, so that they might put him to death,”* <sup>BBE</sup> *“they carefully watched the gates both by day and by night so as to do away with him,”* <sup>LITV</sup> and *“Although in their murderous scheme the Jews watched the gates day and night for him.”* <sup>PHILLIPS</sup>

The determination of the Jews appeared to guarantee they would be successful – at least that is what they were thinking. However, because Saul was a chosen vessel unto the Lord, their plans would not succeed. As it is written, *“There are many devices in a man’s heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand”* (Prov 19:21). God is noted for causing the purposes of the ungodly to fail. As it is written, *“That frustrateth the tokens of the liars, and maketh diviners mad; that turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish”* (Isa 44:25).

It is not by coincidence that the plans of his enemies were *“known of Saul.”* This is an example of the working of the Lord Jesus, upon whose shoulder the government has been placed (Isa 9:6). He carries out the meticulous and

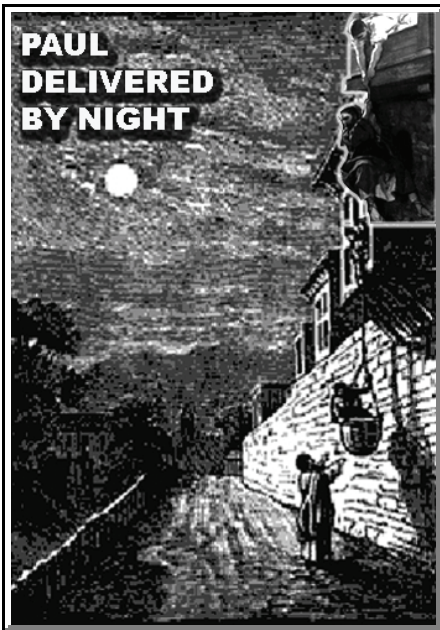
mysterious workings to which Solomon alluded when he wrote, *“Curse not the king, no not in thy thought; and curse not the rich in thy bedchamber: for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter”* (Eccl 10:20). An example of this kind of Divine working is seen in an account of the king of Syria. When his plots against the king of Israel were continually foiled, he called his servants and inquired if one of them was a friend to the king of Israel,

and was divulging his plans to him. It was then that one of his servants replied, stating that none of them were providing the king of Israel with information. He said, *“None, my lord, O king; but Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber”* (2 Kgs 6:12).

This is the kind of thing that was taking place in our text. While some might well conjecture that certain members of the synagogue overheard the plans of Saul’s enemies, that does not get to the source of the matter. **This was actually the reigning Christ delivering Saul from the people, just as He promised He would do:** *“But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee”* (Acts 26:16-17). Our text is an example of such a deliverance, and is evidence of a ruling Christ.

**DELIVERED BY THE DISCIPLES**

<sup>26</sup> **Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket.** Other versions read, *“but his disciples took him by night, and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a large basket,”*<sup>NASB</sup> *“But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall,”*<sup>NIV</sup> *“But his disciples took him at night and let him down through the [city’s] wall, lowering him in a basket or hamper,”*<sup>AMPLIFIED</sup> and *“Saul’s disciples took him one night and let him down through an opening in the wall by lowering him in a basket.”*<sup>PHILLIPS</sup>



Paul recounts this incident in his letter to the Corinthians, providing some additional details. *“In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me: and through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands”* (2 Cor 11:32-33). There is nothing more in Scripture concerning this governor or the king under which he exercised his authority. There is some reference to him in secular history (Pollock [Specimen Hist. Arab. p. 76, 77, 78], The book of 2 Maccabees 5:8, and Josephus [Antiqu. 50:14. c. 1. sect. 4. de Bello Jud. 50:1. c. 6. sect. 2]). However, it is enough to know no more than our text declares, for

Saul is the subject, and not the Jews or those with whom they had aligned themselves. As is abundantly confirmed in Scripture, **the Holy Spirit does not make a practice of informing men of historical persons and facts that have no immediately connection with Divine intent.** It is for this reason that students of the Word must discipline themselves not to be unduly distracted by history, culture, and matters that are extraneous to the text of Scripture itself.

**Humiliating to the Flesh**

Paul places this incident among the things classified as his *“infirmities”* (2 Cor 11:30). There was a sense in which it was a humiliating deliverance – at least in the flesh. It displayed weakness – particularly when compared with deliverances like that of Israel from Pharaoh and his armies (Ex 14:29-30), David from Goliath (1 Sam 17:49-50), Samson’s defeat of a thousand philistines (Judges 15:15), and Shamgar’s defeat of six hundred philistines (Judges 3:31). However, God has not always delivered His people in such a manner, and we do well to take note of it, lest we formulate a faulty view of deliverance and Divine protection. Elijah not only slew 850 prophets of Baal (450 +400), he also fled from before the face of Jezebel (1 Kgs 18:19,40; 19:3-4). Jeremiah was temporarily subjected to the will of his enemies (Jer 38:6). Zechariah was killed by his enemies in the Temple court (2 Chron 24:20-21). James was killed by Herod (Acts 12:2). There were also numerous faithful saints who suffered unspeakable atrocities at the hands of their enemies (Heb 11:35-38). We do well not to develop a naive and juvenile view of Divine protection and deliverance.

**Ungodly Collusion**

The Jews had apparently obtained the approval of the governor of the city to carry out their intended treachery. **It is the invariable nature of the flesh to appeal to the world for help – never to the living God.** This is what the Jews did in carrying out their intentions against the Lord’s. They employed *“wicked hands”* (Acts 2:23), not only appealing to evil Pilate to assist them, but **insisting** that he do so after he had

desired to release Jesus (Acts 3:13).

**Saul’s Disciples**

Note that it was Saul’s own *“disciples”* who assisted his escape from the Jews. When he presented his proofs of Jesus being the Christ, there were apparently some who saw the truth of what he said. The literal rendering of the expression is *“the learners of him,”*<sup>INTERLINEAR</sup> with the *“him”* referring to Saul himself.

Thus Saul escapes by means of creativity and stealth, the disciples lowering him over the wall in a basket. They also did this at an expeditious time, accomplishing the escape during the night. All of this required diligence and perception on their part. In a sense, they were risking their own lives in this matter. **However, the love of the brethren places one’s personal interests in the background, seeking to bring the greatest advantage to the saints – especially when such advantages have been brought through them.**

The incident is reminiscent of the escape of the Israelite spies from Jericho – when Rahab *“let them down by a cord through the window; for her house was upon the town wall, and she dwelt upon the wall”* (Josh 2:15). Something similar occurred when David was aided in his escape from the designs of king Saul. His wife Michal (who was the daughter of Saul), *“let David down through a window: and he went, and fled, and escaped”* (1 Sam 19:12).

**Was It Right to Do This?**

A novice might question whether or not it was proper to flee from the Jews. Is not persecution part and parcel of the life of faith, and is it not proper for men to submit to such maltreatment in faith? The unlearned might cite the words of Jesus in justification of this erroneous view: *“For whosoever will save his life shall lose it”* (Matt 16:25). Such reasoning might appear flawless to some. However, it is a spiritually juvenile way of thinking. The saving of one’s life speaks of the abandonment of Divine interests in a preference for personal ones. That is not the kind of thing we are confronting in this text. This was an

exercise of wisdom, not the expression of selfish interests or a love for self.

Speaking of the persecution they would face, Jesus once said to His disciples, *“But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another”* (Matt 10:23). For that matter, it is said of Jesus Himself, *“After these things Jesus walked in Galilee: for He would not walk in Jewry (Judea), because the Jews sought to kill Him”* (John 7:1).

#### Another Principle

Another principle that is unveiled here is that the Gospel is withdrawn from those who persistently reject it. This was lived out when Jesus wept over Jerusalem, **citing their rejection of Him as a just reason for withdrawal from them.** At that time He said, *“Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. Ye shall not see Me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord”* (Matt 23:38-39).

Jesus also taught His disciples this when He first sent them out. *“And*

*whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet”* (Matt 10:14). When He sent out the seventy, the Lord told them the same thing. *“But into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you not, go your ways out into the streets of the same, and say, Even the very dust of your city, which cleaveth on us, we do wipe off against you: notwithstanding be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you”* (Luke 10:10-11).

When Paul and the company with him were rejected in Antioch of Pisidia, they frankly told the people, *“It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles”* (Acts 13:46). It was then that they *“shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium”* (Acts 13:51).

In all of these cases, there was a remnant of people who accepted the Gospel. Yet, a judgment was rendered

against the general environment because of their obtuseness.

#### A Kind of Judgment

The escape of Saul was, in a sense, a judgment against those Jews that sought to kill him. The Lord could easily have eliminated them, or even enabled Saul to continue among them, refuting their arguments and frustrating their desires. However, that is not what He chose to do, and His action is in perfect agreement with a number of similar incidents in Scripture (Acts 13:50-51; 14:6,19-20; 16:19-23; 17:10,13-15,32-33; 18:12-18; 20:1; 23:16-22; 23:33,35; 24:27; 27:1-5; 2 Cor 1:8-9). Sometimes the witness is withdrawn by means of martyrdom (Gen 4:3-8; 2 Chron 24:21-22; Acts 7:58-60). Sometimes there is a relatively peaceful departure.

There are also times when an escape is accomplished by means of stealth, as in our text. **However, whatever means are employed, it is always a circumstance of greatest gravity when the Gospel of Christ is withdrawn from a people or a region.**

## THE JERUSALEM DISCIPLES ARE AFRAID OF HIM

*“<sup>26</sup> And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.”*

There is a gap of time between this verse and the previous one – we do not know its precise length. Some are of the persuasion that it was a relatively lengthy period of time, with his escape taking place after he had been in Arabia. I am of the persuasion that the trip into Arabia followed this escape. However, this is not a critical matter, and there is no benefit in pursuing it any further.

#### WHEN SAUL WAS COME TO JERUSALEM

*“And when Saul was come to Jerusalem . . .”*

We know from Paul’s letter to the Galatians, that, from one point of

view, this was not the same Saul that initially preached in Damascus. By this time, he had been briefly tutored by Jesus, choosing not to *“confer with flesh and blood”* following his conversion. He therefore did not go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before him. As it is written, *“To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus”* (Gal 1:16-17). After *“three years”* he *“went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter, and stayed with him fifteen days”* (Gal 1:18). It is difficult to correlate the testimony of Paul to the Galatians with the record provided in the book of Acts. I have not been satisfied with my own understanding of the timing of these events. Nor, indeed, does it appear worthy of extensive pursuit. I will simply

say that, following his departure to persecute the saints, it appears that the first time Saul returned to Jerusalem is the reference of both our text and the first chapter of Galatians. This appears to harmonize well with an additional account Paul gave of this occasion before the Jewish council. In that account he did not refer to his trip to Arabia, but spoke of his journey to Jerusalem as taking place shortly after his conversion. Here is the record. I will commence with the words Ananias delivered to Saul. *“For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard. And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord. And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance; And saw Him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning Me.*

And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee: and when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him. And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles” (Acts 22:15-21).

The phrase “come again to Jerusalem” refers to his initial return. This passage corresponds to the passage we are reviewing (9:28-30).

Paul also gave a brief summation of his initial experiences in Christ when he testified before Agrippa. “Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: but showed first unto them of Damascus, **and at Jerusalem**, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance” (Acts 26:19-20).

The parallel accounts are as follows, and confirm the number of things that probably took place during this period of time. I gather they are all referring to the same visit to Jerusalem, with each accenting something different.

**ACTS 9:26-27**

- ⇒ Saul come to Jerusalem following his escape from Damascus.
- ⇒ Saul attempts to join the disciples in Jerusalem, but they are afraid of him.
- ⇒ Barnabas intercedes for him, bringing him to the apostles and testifying of his encounter with Christ.
- ⇒ Saul is with the apostles, going in and out of Jerusalem, yet there is no record of him being specifically taught by them.
- ⇒ He speaks to the Jews boldly, who take counsel to kill him.
- ⇒ The brethren send him to Tarsus, which is next to Syria.

**ACTS 22:17-21**

- ⇒ When returning to Jerusalem, Saul

receives a vision while in the Temple, in which Jesus reveals that he must leave the city.

**ACTS 26:20**

- ⇒ Saul preaches Christ when at Jerusalem, declaring to the Jews that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting of repentance.

**GAL 1:18-23**

- ⇒ Saul returned to Jerusalem three years after his initial departure to persecute the church.
- ⇒ During that time he conferred with Peter, but did not see any of the other apostles.
- ⇒ Following that visit he went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia.

**HE ASSAYED TO JOIN HIMSELF TO THE DISCIPLES**

“... he assayed to join himself to the disciples . . .” Other versions read, “tried to join,”<sup>NKJV</sup> “trying to associate,”<sup>NASB</sup> “attempted to join,”<sup>NRSV</sup> “tried to meet with,”<sup>NLT</sup> “assayed to couple himself to,”<sup>PNT</sup> and “made several attempts to associate with.”<sup>WEYMOUTH</sup>

The words translated “join himself”

church situation in our country. First, the word “join,” when associated with identity with a body of people, is not considered to mean cleave to, have close association with, enter into close relation, or engage in building together. It generally is associated with mere formality, and perhaps the adoption of a given set of religious traditions. Here, however, the word has everything to do with being knit together in a common cause, and partaking of a common life.

Secondly, there is obviously some kind of formality associated with Saul’s effort. He was surely not merely attempting to attend the meetings of the disciples in an informal sort of way. There was some sense in which he sought to be a part of the disciples in Jerusalem. Without pursuing this matter into the region of futility, there is a tendency among many people to actually avoid some form of formal identity. This would involve some kind of positive action that made clear they wanted to be associated with a given body of believers. While it is not my purpose to set forth unwarranted requirements, it does seem to me that it is in order for some action to be taken by believers that clearly states their intention to be more than an occasional visitor. None of us should take for

**While it is true that Saul had been known for persecuting the church in Jerusalem three years earlier, there is more to this matter than this. There is an underlying suggestion that things went on in the assembly that were not designed for those who were not disciples – things that set the people apart from all non-disciples, making them a peculiar people.**

are translated from a single word that has the following meaning: “to glue together, cement, fasten together . . . to join oneself as an associate,”<sup>THAYER</sup> “Adhere to, cleave to . . . unite with,”<sup>FRIBERG</sup> “to put together, build,”<sup>LIDDELL-SCOTT</sup> “to enter into close relation with,”<sup>LEH</sup> and “join closely together, cling to, associate with.”<sup>GINGRICH</sup>

Right here we confront something that differs radically from the

granted that our desires are understood without some clear form of expression.

**THEY WERE ALL AFRAID OF HIM**

“... but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.”

The contention of the brethren was not that they refused to have Saul

among them – at least that is not what the text says. It is rather that they were “*afraid of him not believing that he was a disciple.*”<sup>NASB</sup> They were not convinced that he was a follower of Jesus Christ.

This is a most arresting consideration! While it is true that Saul had been known for persecuting the church in Jerusalem three years earlier, there is more to this matter than this. **There is an underlying suggestion that things went on in the assembly that were**

**not designed for those who were not disciples** – things that set the people apart from all non-disciples, making them a peculiar people. In Saul’s case, this variance was perceived as something that could provoke him to aggression against the disciples.

There is no suggestion in the text that the disciples tailored their gatherings to convince Saul, or that some special initiative was launched to ensure that he would become a disciple. I will

not carry this reasoning any further. However, it ought to be abundantly apparent that there was vast difference between those early disciples and those who profess to be disciples today.

Those early disciples were not naive or simplistic in their reasoning. They were not right about Saul at first, but they would yield to sound reasoning when it is presented to them, thus confirming their fundamental sincerity.

## BARNABAS PERCEIVES AND TAKES UP SAUL’S CASE

***“<sup>27</sup> But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how He had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. <sup>28</sup> And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem.”***

Now, for the first time since Acts 4:36, Barnabas surfaces again. Until this time, all we know about him is the following.

- ⇨ He was a man named Joses (Joseph) – Acts 4:36a
- ⇨ He was called “*Barnabas*” by the apostles, which means “*The son of consolation,*” or “*the son of encouragement*”(Acts 4:36b).

property, and laid the funds at the feet of the apostles (Acts 4:37).

From this we learn that he was a Jew, for so his name indicates. He was from Cyprus, an island in the Mediterranean Sea. He was obviously active among the believers in the ministry of encouragement and comfort. This means that he was noted for his love of the brethren, which confirms that he had passed from death unto life. He was also an unselfish man, devoted to the work of the Lord. Those are certainly comely qualities that will surely erupt in other notable deeds, one of which will now be chronicled.

### BUT BARNABAS TOOK HIM

*“But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in*

Saul had testified of his experience when he “*tried to join the disciples*” in Jerusalem (v 26). Barnabas was evidently there, and believed what Saul had testified. Not only, therefore, was Barnabas a comforter, or encourager, he was also a discerning man, being able to decipher the truth when he heard it.

### Barnabas Took Him

We learn from Acts 13:1 that Barnabas was also a prophet. Paul once said that a prophet was capable of discerning when the truth had been spoken by someone else. As it is written, “*If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord*” (1 Cor 14:37). Falling into that category, Barnabas at once takes up the case of Saul, pressing for his acceptance by the brethren. He there aligns himself with Saul, taking him unto himself.

### Brought Him to the Apostles

Barnabas knows that the leaders and principle men of the church are the apostles. Their word will be the final word to the rest of the brethren. He therefore brings Saul to the apostles to present his case, subjecting it to their discernment. He knows they will be able to recognize the truth, just as they did with the penitential people at Pentecost, Ananias and Sapphira, the seven deacons of the sixth chapter, Simon the Sorcerer, and others.

**It ought to be noted that one of**

**It ought to be noted that one of the required traits of a true spiritual leader is that of spiritual discernment. A person cannot lead the flock of God if he is not able to distinguish between sheep and wolves, and truth and error.**

- ⇨ He was from the country of Cyprus (Acts 4:36c).
- ⇨ When the distribution of goods was being made, he sold a piece of

*the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.”*

It is clear from this text that

the required traits of a true spiritual leader is that of spiritual discernment. A person cannot lead the flock of God if he is not able to distinguish between sheep and wolves, and truth and error.

### He Declared Unto Them

Here we are exposed to the nature of Saul's testimony, which is doubtless the outward source of the information Barnabas relates. It is important to note the kind of things he cites as qualifying Saul for acceptance.

- ⇨ Saul had seen Jesus in the way, or on the road to Damascus.
- ⇨ Jesus Himself had spoken to Saul.
- ⇨ Saul had preached boldly in the name of Jesus at Damascus.

There are at least two notable things to consider here. First, nothing is directly said about Saul's character, or that he had changed, so that he no longer persecuted the church. Those things will become evident, however, in what is said. Second, the primary evidence that confirmed Saul's acceptance was that Jesus appeared to him and spoke to him. It was the response of Saul to that appearance and instruction that once and for all confirmed his acceptance: he preached in Jesus' name in the very city and synagogue where he had originally planned to arrest and incarcerate believers. Later, Paul himself would summarize his response in his testimony to Agrippa: "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision" (Acts 26:19).

It is still true that those who

labor in the vineyard of the Lord are to be noted for these two principle things.

- ⇨ They must have seen and heard something, being cognizant of the truth itself.
- ⇨ They must be obedient to the truth to which they have been exposed.

**Where these qualities are not found, men must not be permitted to do service in the body of Christ.** These virtues equate to the requirements for the first deacons: "men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom" <sup>NKJV</sup> (Acts 6:3).

### AND HE WAS WITH THEM

"<sup>28</sup> And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem." Other versions read, "he was with them moving about freely in Jerusalem," <sup>NASB</sup> "Saul stayed with them and moved about freely," <sup>NIV</sup> "So he remained with them and went all over Jerusalem," <sup>CJB</sup> "he was conversant with them," <sup>GENEVA</sup> "So he was staying with them, associating openly with them," <sup>NET</sup> "he had his conversation with them at Jerusalem," <sup>TNT</sup> "Then they accepted him, and after that he was constantly with the believers," <sup>LIVING</sup> "Henceforth Saul was one of them, going in and out of the city," <sup>WEYMOUTH</sup> "So he went in and out [as one] among them," <sup>AMPLIFIED</sup> and "Saul joined with them in all their activities in Jerusalem." <sup>PHILLIPS</sup>

From this we learn of effectiveness of Barnabas' efforts.

- ⇨ The apostles at once recognized the situation and received Saul into

their fellowship – "then they accepted him." <sup>LIVING</sup>

- ⇨ The brethren also concurred, receiving Saul into their fellowship – "he was constantly with the believers." <sup>LIVING</sup>
- ⇨ Saul became obviously one with the apostles and the brethren – "Henceforth Saul was one of them." <sup>WEYMOUTH</sup>
- ⇨ Saul stayed with the apostles and the brethren, moving everywhere with them – "he was with them coming in and going out."
- ⇨ Saul's manner of life was identified by his identity with the saints – "he had his conversation with them." <sup>TNT</sup>
- ⇨ Saul participated in the activities of the brethren – he "joined with them in all their activities." <sup>PHILLIPS</sup>
- ⇨ None of them doubted Saul's acceptance in Christ, or opposed him in any way – "moving about freely." <sup>NASB</sup>

There we have an example of what it means to be "added to the church" (Acts 2:47), of believers being "the more added to the Lord" (Acts 5:14), and of the Lord setting the members in the body "as it hath pleased Him" (1 Cor 12:18). **In our time, being a "member" of the church is generally not perceived as being involved with the members, or continuing together.** That, however, is the kind of association that is consistently represented in the book of Acts, and we do well to duly note it.

## SAUL SPEAKS BOLDLY AND DISPUTES AGAINST THE GRECIANS

"<sup>29</sup> And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him." <sup>30</sup> Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus."

Just as Saul had done in

Damascus, he now declares Christ in Jerusalem among the Jews. Although the text does not say so, it is assumed that he was preaching in the synagogues, a place where he would be found preaching in virtually every city he entered.

### HE SPAKE BOLDLY IN THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS

"And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus . . ." Other versions read, "speaking in the name of the Lord without fear," <sup>BBE</sup> "speaking confidently in name of the Lord," <sup>DOUAY</sup> "with the power and authority of the Lords," <sup>GWN</sup> "he spoke openly," <sup>MRD</sup> "preaching fearlessly," <sup>NJB</sup> "continued to speak courageously," <sup>WILLIAMS</sup> and

*“Preaching freely and confidently and boldly.”*<sup>AMPLIFIED</sup>

Saul’s preaching was not mere blustering, and it was not the relating of his personal experience. He spoke confidently, freely, and with an obvious assurance, for such is the meaning of *“boldly.”* One might be inclined to think this lends itself to the thought that Saul spoke more about what had happened to him, and what a change had been made in him. While I do not doubt that he made mention of these things, the text clearly confirms that this was not his focus. He spoke confidently and publically *“in the name of the Lord Jesus.”* He did not speak in the name of the church, or in his own name, or in the name of some other man. He rather spoke in the name of the One who had appeared to Him, called him into the apostleship, and taught him.

I have not found the few explanations that have been offered for speaking *“in the name of the Lord Jesus,”* to be in way satisfying. The view that says this means speaking by the authority of Jesus appears to me to come far short of the intended meaning, and seems to me to be nothing more than a lifeless and mechanical explanation.



**Preaching in the name of Jesus speaks of the circumference of preaching – the intellectual and spiritual border within with preaching is done, and beyond which one refuses to go.**

If it is true that the *“light of the knowledge of the glory of God”* is seen *“in the face of Jesus Christ”* (2 Cor 4:6), how is it remotely possible for valid preaching to focus on something else? If it is true that God Himself can be understood only by seeing Jesus Christ, how can it be possible for man and his obligation to be perceived by looking at someone or something else?

**The truth of the matter is that the heart of Saul’s preaching was Jesus Christ Himself.** He did not set out to reform the Jewish nation, but to proclaim the Lord’s Christ. By speaking *“in the name of the Lord Jesus,”* he presented a circumstance in which Jesus Christ overshadowed everything and everyone else. If Jesus is the key Man – **“THE man Christ Jesus”** (1 Tim 2:5), how is it possible for anyone else to be correctly perceived by men as more important than Jesus, or more to be emphasized than Jesus?

I will say plainly that too much preaching leaves people thinking too little about the Lord Jesus. Such preaching is not *“in the name of the Lord Jesus,”* for it does not leave men thinking about Jesus, pursuing Him, or engaging in a fervent and unrelenting quest to *“know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death”* (Phil 3:10). Neither is such preaching by Jesus’ authority.

When Saul preached in Damascus he **proved** that Jesus was *“very Christ.”* I do not doubt that this is also a fair summation of what he preached in Jerusalem, perhaps elaborating on the implications of Him being *“very Christ.”*

**AND DISPUTED AGAINST THE GRECIANS**

*“... and disputed against the Grecians . . .”* Other versions read, *“disputed against the Hellenists,”*<sup>NKJV</sup> *“talking and arguing with the hellenistic Jews,”*<sup>NASB</sup> *“talked and debated with the*

*Grecian Jews,”*<sup>NIV</sup> *“spoke and argued with the Hellenists,”*<sup>NRSV</sup> and *“talked and debated with the Greek-speaking Jews.”*<sup>CJB</sup>

The *“Grecians”* were not Gentiles, but were Greek-speaking Jews – probably from other countries. The word translated *“Grecians”* is Ἑλληνιστάς (hel-lay-nis-tace). The word *“hellenist”* is a transliteration – letter-for-letter translation instead of a meaning. By definition, the word means *“to copy the manners . . . of the Greeks or to use the Greek language; one who uses the Greek tongue, employed in the N.T. of Jews born in foreign lands and speaking Greek (Grecian Jews),”*<sup>THAYER</sup> *“a Greek-speaking Jew in contrast to one speaking a Semitic language a Greek-speaking Jew in contrast to one speaking a Semitic language,”*<sup>FRIEBERG</sup> It is used three times in the book of Acts (6:1; 9:29; 11:20)a, always referring to Jews from outside the perimeter of the land of Israel, who spoke the Greek language. The practice of speaking the Greek language universally was established by Alexander the Great when he ruled the world.

It is generally understood that this was also an appropriate description for the Jews who opposed Stephen. These were referred to as *“libertines,”* who were Jewish slaves who had been freed. **It is quite possible that their Grecian culture had robbed them of much of their Jewish heritage, making it more difficult to take hold of the truth.**

These Grecian Jews could not receive the truth about Jesus Christ, and thus disputation rose when Saul preached *“in the name of Jesus.”* Later, Paul would *“dispute”* in the synagogue of the Jews in Athens, arguing the case for Jesus. In this activity, both in Jerusalem and Athens, he was throwing down opposing arguments – *“casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God”* (2 Cor 10:5). This is the same thing Stephen did so powerfully, so that his opponents *“were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit with which he spoke”* (Acts 6:10).

**THEY WENT ABOUT TO SLAY HIM**

*“... but they went about to slay him.”* Just as with Stephen, the opponents of Saul, not being able to confute him, determined to kill him. This does not highlight how bad they were,

but rather **displays the hostility between the thinking of unregenerate men and the truth of Christ.** The carnal mind is “*enmity against God*” (Rom 8:7), and the preaching of the cross is “*foolishness*” to such a mind (1 Cor 1:18). **Because preaching that is focused upon Christ necessarily exposes men to more of God Himself, this hostility is magnified.**

Saul made no effort to neutralize this hostility by weakening his message. Instead, he disputed with the Grecians, arguing against their foolish thinking. He did not seek to develop a relationship with them, or tone down his words to make them more palatable. This brought out their hostility all the more, so that killing Saul became their quest.

This is the same response he received from the Jews in Damascus, where he had to escape their aggression, being let down over the wall in a basket.

**This incident exposes the fallacy of trying to make friends with the ungodly before delivering the Gospel to them** – although I am being extremely charitable in suggesting that what such people deliver is even the Gospel.

Holy men in the past used no compromising technique, seeking to endear the people to themselves before delivering their message. Moses did not (Deut 9:6). The prophets certainly made no such effort (2 Chron 24:19). Nor, indeed, did John the Baptist (Matt 3:7), or the Lord Jesus Himself (Matt 12:41-42). Whence, then, is the origin of this dreadful practice that is being hawked in our time? Rest assured, it has not come from God or any godly person. **Ultimately, this practice has its origin with Satan, who demonstrated it in his approach to Eve.**

It is not the aim of any godly

person to intentionally offend people, or to start arguments about tangential issues. It is written that “*the servant of God must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those who oppose themselves*” (2 Tim 2:24). This, however, has more to do with manners than with the message itself. When there are ideas expressed that are opposed to the truth of Jesus Christ, **they are to be cast down, not tolerated.** When men assert their thoughts against the Lord, it is no time for the man of God to practice tolerance. When the Lord sends a man to preach the Gospel (Rom 10:15), he had better deliver the record God has given of His Son. **If that record agitates the people, the issue is to be pressed until they either yield or their carnality erupts.** Search the Scriptures and see that this has been the consistent response of men of God to aggressive reasoning against the Lord.

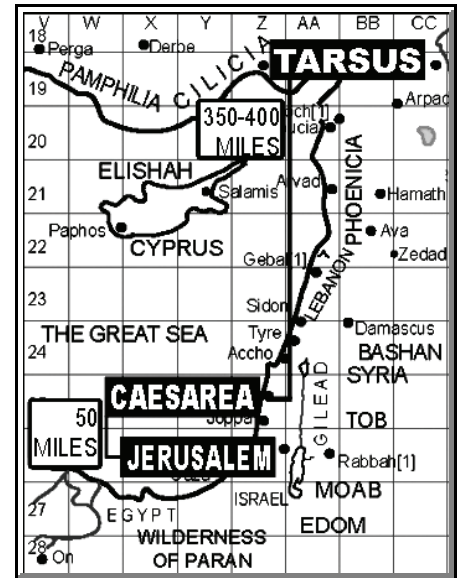
One of the chief difficulties of our time is that many professed preachers and teachers are not able to “*defend*” the Gospel (Phil 1:17). Such men are not to be in the front lines of spiritual battle. This is why James wrote, “*My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation*” (James 3:1). The idea is that offenses are caused by the words of those who preach truth – not wrongful offenses, but those which are caused because the truth grates against the thinking of worldly minded people. Those who cannot endure and address such conflicts needs to find another occupation.

**WHEN THE BRETHREN KNEW**

“<sup>30</sup>Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus.”

Just as the brethren in

Damascus, the believers in Jerusalem were selfless and alert. They were aware of the plot against Saul, not being wrapped up in their own personal lives. Therefore, they took appropriate measures to deliver Saul from the hand of his enemies. Apparently, they did not take into account any personal jeopardy that might be involved.



The trip from Jerusalem to Caesarea (as distinguished from Caesarea Philippi) was about fifty miles. It was a sea port, which apparently provided for Saul to sail to Tarsus, which was about four hundred miles North. In the region of Cilicia. It is apparent that these brethren were not seeking a convenient, quick and easy way, to deliver Saul. They entertained a genuine concern for him, and therefore took whatever measures were necessary to see to it that he was safe.

Here is the love of the brethren being lived out, lifted from the realm of mere philosophy and religious talk. This is the real thing.

**A PERIOD OF REST FOR THE CHURCHES**

“<sup>31</sup>Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the

comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.”

It is important to note that thus

far, throughout the book of Acts, the attention has been upon the church – the believers, or disciples. Other people were involved, but the focus was not upon

them. People who became significant did so when they were added to the church, or were numbered with the believers. If we were to confine ourselves to Scripture, we know very little of the social conditions of that time in the land of promise – Judea (South), Galilee (North), and Samaria (middle section). The recollection of the working of the Lord rarely includes any extensive details of anything unrelated to that work. I say this because of the remarkable diversion to “other things” (Mk 4:19) that have penetrated the *Christian* society of our day. **As is always the case, whatever is**

These were those who had been “added to the church” by the Lord Himself (Acts 2:47). These were groups of disciples, who had left all to follow Jesus. This is speaking of those who were of one heart and soul, and were of the same mind.

Prior to this, the chief priests and Jewish leaders had come against the apostles (4:1-3; 5:40). The church had been disrupted by the dishonesty of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:10-10). The Jewish council had stoned Stephen (Acts 7:58-60). The church in Jerusalem had been persecuted, and the believers

are approved may be made manifest among you” (1 Cor 11:19). It is only those who have “no root in themselves” who are “offended” by persecution and consequently “fall away” (Mk 4:17; Lk 8:134). These having been removed from the church, they now enjoyed a period of rest – a time without persecution, undue disputation, liars within, and intruders like Simon the Sorcerer.

**AND WERE EDIFIED**

“... and were edified...” Other versions read, “being built up,”<sup>NASB</sup> “strengthened,”<sup>NIV</sup> “was built up,”<sup>NRSV</sup> and “was made strong.”<sup>BBE</sup>

**Edification is the process through which this building process is accomplished. God does not come to dwell among His people because they praise Him, but because they are built up in Christ! I realize that such a statement is tantamount to heresy among some people.**

This is the grand objective for the body of Christ – “the edifying of itself in love” (Eph 4:16). The idea of edification parallels the idea of strengthening an edifice, fortifying it so it can endure all manner of testing, and is adequate to house its intended contents. In the case of the church, it is intended grow “into a holy temple in the Lord” (Eph 2:21). That is, it is spiritually fortified in order that the Lord Himself might dwell in it. The Amplified Bible reads, “continues to rise (grow, increase) into a holy temple in the Lord [a sanctuary dedicated, consecrated, and sacred to the presence of the Lord].”

allowed to compete with the truth always upstages it. It is good to take special note of the manner in which Luke, being moved along by the Holy Spirit, is relating the events of that time. He consistently writes in such a manner as to move Jesus Christ into the forefront, representing the church as the environment in which He is working out His purpose.

scattered (Acts 8:1-3; 9:21). There was even an initiative against the brethren in Damascus (Acts 9:2). All of this had stretched over a period of seven to ten years (30-33 A.D. until 40 A.D.).

**THEN HAD THE CHURCHES REST**

“Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria...” Other versions read that the churches “had peace,”<sup>NKJV</sup> “enjoyed peace,”<sup>NASB</sup> “enjoyed a time of peace,”<sup>NIV</sup> and “experienced peace.”<sup>NET</sup>

Now, however, the powers of darkness are stopped by the King, and the church is given a time of “rest” – peace, quietness, and expansion without continual resistance. The word “rest” comes from a word with the following lexical meaning: “exemption from the rage and havoc of war... free from persecution,”<sup>THAYER</sup> “a state of peace,”<sup>FRIBERG</sup> “favorable circumstances involving peace and tranquility,”<sup>LOUW-NIDA</sup> and “peace, harmony, tranquility.”<sup>GINGRICH</sup>

There was a different climate in those early days – before factions and divisions flooded the landscape. What do you suppose people would think you meant if you spoke of “the churches” in Missouri, Oklahoma, and Kansas having “rest?” It seems to me that all manner of confusion would break out as people would ask, “What churches?” “Which ones?” However, there is no question here concerning the identity of the people.

Do not suppose for a moment that Satan gave up, or was chased away by the believers. This was a peace that came down from above – it was an imposed peace, if you please, were the powers of darkness were not permitted to agitate the enemies of the Lord against His people. While these powers were permitted to rage against the saints, there was a certain sifting that took place. As it is written, “For there must be also heresies among you, that they which

Perhaps you have noted that it is now a sign of professed worship to invite the Lord to come into the assembly. Men also speak of standing on holy ground, as though they had come into a place external to themselves where God met with them. I realized there are some elements of truth in such expressions, and that men often are not aware of what they are saying. However, it is important to know that God’s intention is not to visit the churches, but to dwell among them. That is the reason for the church in the first. Its purpose is to be “an habitation of God through the Spirit,” or “a dwelling place of God in the Spirit”<sup>NKJV</sup> (Eph 2:22).

Edification is the process through which this building process is accomplished. **God does not come to dwell among His people because they praise Him, but because they are built up in Christ!** I realize that such a statement is tantamount to heresy among some people. However, it is the view that allows for God to dwell among a weak

and uninformed people that is the heresy – and it is a serious one. God has spoken clearly to this subject, for there is no need for any confusion concerning it. *“Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God”* (2 Cor 6:17-7:1). This condition will be realized when, and only when, the people are *“edified.”*

Some circumstances that are implied by edification are as follows.

- ⇒ Moral strength, so that the devil can be resisted (James 4:7; Rev 12:11).
- ⇒ Wisdom and spiritual understanding, so that the things of God are comprehended (Col 1:9; Eph 5:17).
- ⇒ A growing sense of being a stranger and a pilgrim in this world, that causes one to *“groan”* under the weight of the bondage of corruption (1 Pet 2:11; Rom 8:23; 2 Cor 5:2).
- ⇒ A corresponding longing for the coming of the Lord, and the donning of our house which is from heaven (2 or 2:5; Rom 8:23; Phil 3:20-21; Eph 1:14; 4:30).
- ⇒ A knowledge and comprehension of the Scripture (2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Pet 1:19).
- ⇒ Spiritual mastery in the matter of setting our affection on things above, and not on things on the earth (Col 3:1-2).

The absence of these, and similar, spiritual qualities, confirms the corresponding absence of edification. Where believers are not going up into Christ (Eph 4:15), they have not been edified. This can only be explained by the absence of proper teaching and/or impure hearts and carnal minds.

#### AND WALKING IN THE FEAR OF

#### THE LORD

*“... and walking in the fear of the Lord, . . .”* Other versions read, *“going on in the fear of the Lord,”*<sup>NASB</sup> *“living in the fear of the Lord,”*<sup>NIV</sup> and *“walking in the respect and reverential fear of the Lord.”*<sup>AMPLIFIED</sup>

“Walking” has to do with the consistent manner of life, and includes focus as well as a hearty devotion. “The fear of the Lord” is by no means a casual expression. Religious men have done their best to neutralize the impact of the word “fear” by using terms like *respect*, *reverence*, and *awe*. However, those words have more of a philosophical bent than one that pertains to God Almighty.

**Religious men have done their best to neutralize the impact of the word “fear” by using terms like respect, reverence, and awe. However, those words have more of a philosophical bent than one that pertains to God Almighty.**

As used here, the words *“the fear”* come from the Greek word τῷ φόβῳ. The Greek word phobos, is the one from which we derive the word phobia, substantiating the strength of the word. The root meaning of this word is “terror,” and the elaboration of that meaning is as follows: *“fear, dread, terror,”*<sup>THAYER</sup> and *“a state of severe distress, aroused by intense concern for impending pain, danger, etc.”*<sup>LOUW-NIDA</sup>

The words *“respect”* and *“reverence”* are appropriate only to the degree that they reflect the idea of terror and dread. The difference here is that the fear, dead, or terror, does not cause one to run from the Lord, but to the Lord. However, and make no mistake about it, the terror that moves one to *“flee”* to the Lord for refuge is very real, and is not to be mitigated by the employment of watered down words that have no significant meaning to the hearers. Ponder these clarifying expressions:

⇒ *“And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake”* (Heb 12:21).

⇒ *“My flesh trembleth for fear of thee; and I am afraid of thy judgments”* (Psa 119:120).

⇒ *“Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts”* (Isa 6:5).

⇒ *“And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last”* (Rev 1:17).

⇒ *“Therefore I was left alone, and saw*

*this great vision, and there remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength”* (Dan 10:8).

⇒ *“Knowing therefore the terror [φόβον, phobos, fear] of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences”* (2 Cor 5:11).

⇒ *“Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ”* (Eph 6:5).

⇒ *“Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling”* (Phil 2:12).

⇒ *“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”* (Heb 10:31).

⇨ “For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and **trembleth at my word**” (Isa 66:2).

No person of Scriptural reference has ever been knowledgeable in the presence of God or the glorified Christ and maintained an attitude of casualness. There is such an abrasiveness between the Divine nature and flesh that fear grips the heart of those in the body who know they are dealing with the God of heaven. This is the kind of fear that, mingled with faith, moves them to “mortify the deeds of the body” (Col 3:5), perfect holiness “in the fear of the Lord” (2 Cor 7:1-2), and “love not the world, neither the things that are in the world” (1 John 2:15). Where these things are not being done, God is not feared; and, where God is not feared, He is not known!

No congregation will be blessed by the Lord that does not fear Him. Jesus said to His disciples, “But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him” (Luke 12:5). Peter said, “Fear God!” (1 Pet 2:17). A mighty angel from heaven shouted to the inhabitants of the earth, “Fear God and give glory to Him!” (Rev 14:7). I see nothing in those expressions that suggests a kind of casual reverence that does not promote an aggressive stance against darkness and an earnest effort to walk in the light as He is in the light (1 John 1:7).

**AND WALKING IN THE COMFORT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

“ . . . and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost . . .” Other versions read, “encouraged by the Holy Spirit,”<sup>NIV</sup> “counsel of the Holy Spirit,”<sup>CJB</sup> “encouragement of the Holy Spirit,”<sup>CSB</sup> “consolation of the Holy Ghost,”<sup>DOUAY</sup> “the help of the Holy Spirit,”<sup>IE</sup> and “the

consolation and exhortation of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>AMPLIFIED</sup>



The word “comfort” has more to do with rationality than feeling – with perception than emotion. It is given to men in words and thoughts rather than impulses. It has to do with an increased level of Kingdom intelligence, where eternal verity is more clearly perceived than the fleeting things of this present evil world. Much, if not all, of this is directly related to the Word of God, which is the expression of the mind of the Lord. Here, in our thinking, is where we have fellowship with Christ (1 Cor 1:9), the communion of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 13:14), and access unto the Father (Eph 2:18). As pleasant as feelings may be, they are not even in the same category as sanctified thought. It is said of the wicked that “God is not in all his thoughts” (Psa 10:4).

In our text, the fact that the churches were walking “in the comfort of the Holy Spirit” means that God was in all of their thoughts. They were comforted, consoled, encouraged, and helped by what they comprehended. All of this took place through the faculty of their faith, and because they were edified and walking in the fear of the Lord. In this day of salvation, that posture of life will still yield the same results.

**WERE MULTIPLIED**

“ . . . were multiplied.” Other versions read, “continued to increase,”

<sup>NASB</sup> “grew in numbers,”<sup>NIV</sup> “was increased greatly,”<sup>BBE</sup> “their numbers kept multiplying,”<sup>CJB</sup> “continued to grow,”<sup>NJB</sup> and “the group of believers grew larger and larger.”<sup>IE</sup>

Here we are being exposed to a living church, not a strategizing one. It was its life, not its program, that caused this increase. It involved the power of the Spirit, not the wisdom of men. This was preceded by rest, edification, the fear of the Lord, and the comforting ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Throughout the book of Acts we have confronted this kind of growth – growth that was totally lacking of human wisdom and fleshly stratagem. “There were added to them . . . the Lord added to the church daily . . . believers were the more added . . . the number of disciples was multiplied . . . the word of God increased, and the number of disciples multiplied” (Acts 2:41,47; 5:14; 6:1,7).

As Isaiah prophesied, this is the nature of the Kingdom over which Jesus presides – to “increase” (Isa 9:6-7). Daniel also confirmed this Kingdom characteristic (Dan 2:35,44).

In my judgment, where this is not happening, there is some form of sifting taking place – sifting that is designed to remove “the old leaven” (1 Cor 5:7-8). That sifting can come through persecution and various forms of opposition from the world. It can also come through a deluge of erroneous teaching that attracts those with impure hearts. However, when the church has rest, and when it is being edified, the Holy Spirit will minister consolation, comfort, and encouragement, and the body of Christ will increase. Just as in nature, proper growth and advancement must be preceded by sound health. In the Spirit, the body of Christ must be spiritually healthy if it expects to make appropriate advancement in Christ Jesus. A sick church is a static one.

**CONCLUSION**

We have thus been introduced to || the conversion of Saul of Tarsus – an || epoch in the history of the church, His

conversion had nothing whatsoever to do with the strategies of men. It was wholly initiated by the Lord Jesus Himself, and carried forward with the help and

encouragement of those with pure hearts and a grasp of the truth. Jesus is still governing His Kingdom, and doing so with a strict regard for His body, which is

the church. When His people are edified, walking in the fear of the Lord, and being comforted by the Holy Spirit, He is faithful to give the increase.

**Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 1/18/2008. We will continue our current series of lessons on the book of Acts. The Forty-fourth lesson will cover verses 32 through 43 of the ninth chapter: "PETER SPREADS THE WORD IN JOPPA." Having dealt with the conversion of Saul, the narrative now turns to Peter. He goes to into the region of Lydda, where he heals a man who had been paralyzed for eight years. As a result, all who dwelt in Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord. Going to Joppa, Peter then raised a woman named Dorcas from the dead. This was known throughout the region, and many believed on the Lord. The Gospel continues to spread powerfully throughout large regions. Our meeting will begin at 7:00 P.M. You are invited to bring your family and friends for fellowship around the Word of God. Refreshments are served afterward, with a time of extended fellowship for everyone.**

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COMMENTARY on Acts: <http://wotruth.com/Acts.htm>