

## ACTS 9:19-31: SAUL THE PERSECUTOR TURNS PREACHER

This paragraph covers a period of at least three years. Before we look at it, a few words on Saul's earlier life are in order.

### SAUL'S BOYHOOD & BACKGROUND

- 1. Birth & Early Life: Acts 22:3**, he was born in Tarsus, a major city in the Roman Province of Cilicia-Syria in Asia Minor. Tarsus, though ten miles inland on the Cydnus River, was a prosperous port that had 1000 years of history. As a leading center of learning, its university rivaled Athens and Alexandria as the three most influential in the Roman Empire! Thus Saul was raised in an old, established, cosmopolitan, Greek-speaking city. There he received his first schooling and learned his trade of leather-working/tent-making (Acts 18:3). This trade was closely associated with the chief manufactured product of the region, *cilicium*, a cloth spun from goat's hair used for making cloaks, curtains, and coverings.
- 2. His Name(s):** at birth he received two names. His Jewish name was Saul (both parents were Jews of the tribe of Benjamin, Philippians 3:5). His Roman name was Paulus; in English, Paul (he was a freeborn Roman citizen, Acts 22:25-28). Luke refers to him by his Jewish name in Acts 9:1-13:9, thereafter, only by his Roman name.
- 3. His Training as a Pharisee:** not only did Saul secure educationally all that Tarsus had to offer, as a young adult he studied the Pharisee tradition under Gamaliel, the most distinguished of all Jewish teachers in Jerusalem (Acts 22:3). Paul did become a Pharisee, which meant that he entered public life as such at age 30. Sir William Ramsay estimates that he was born somewhere between 2 BC – 2 AD.
- 4. Relative to Jesus Christ:** it is not likely that Saul was present at the crucifixion of Christ nor that he had ever witnessed any of Christ's ministries, since he never makes mention of such.

Thus when we meet Saul (Paul) in Acts 9, he is approximately 35-37 years old.

### ACTS 9:19b-25 PAUL'S INITIAL MINISTRIES IN DAMASCUS (3 YEARS)

- v. 19a, 20 **Paul Preaches:** immediately upon his conversion, Paul went to various synagogues and \_\_\_\_\_ that Christ (Messiah) was \_\_\_\_\_ (Deity).

“preached” = imperfect active indicative of κηρυσσω/kerusso

- v. 21 **The Response:** his listeners were amazed, surprised and \_\_\_\_\_ (both verbs are \_\_\_\_\_), “Isn't this the persecutor, the destroyer of Christians in Jerusalem who had come to Damascus with the same intent?” This is the only response Luke records. Apparently, Paul had little or no success in these first pronouncements.

(OVER)

## PARENTHESIS: PAUL SPENDS TIME IN ARABIA

Nearly all scholars agree that at this point, Paul went into the upper Arabian Desert, that is, to Nabataean Arabia, and there the Lord taught him (see Galatians 1:11-17). Someone has well said, “He went into Arabia with the law in his mind and returned with the Prison Epistles in his heart.”

It is probable that the 3 years (Galatians 1:17) in Arabia were interrupted by return visits to Damascus as Acts 9:22, 23 indicate.

v. 22 “But Saul \_\_\_\_\_  
(imperfect passive indicative) and \_\_\_\_\_ bewildering the Jews by  
\_\_\_\_\_ that the one he preached was the very Christ (Messiah).”

v. 23 **The Response of the Jews:** after some time (3 years?), they sought to kill him.

v. 24, 25 **Believers Protect Paul:** the plot against Paul becomes known to the Christians, who then secretly lower Paul in a basket over the city wall. Paul then flees to Jerusalem.

Here see II Corinthians 11:32, 33 for Paul’s own words on this rescue. The entire garrison of Aretas, King of the Nabataeans, was after Paul. King Aretas died in AD 40.

## ACTS 9:26-29 PAUL’S FIRST VISIT TO JERUSALEM AS A CHRISTIAN

v. 26 At Jerusalem, Paul \_\_\_\_\_ (imperfect active indicative) to join himself to the disciples, but they \_\_\_\_\_ (imperfect passive indicative) of him because they continually believed not (present active participle) that he was a true disciple.

v. 27,28 Enter Barnabas, “Son of Encouragement” (4:36) an exhorter, a helping-type believer: “he took hold of Paul and led him to the apostles” – only Peter and James, the half brother of the Lord, (according to Galatians 1:18, 19). Paul stayed only 15 days in Jerusalem, apparently all at Peter’s house.

v. 29 Paul, now the preacher, takes up in Jerusalem where Stephen left off with the Hellenists, the Greek-speaking Jews of Jerusalem. They resented the message of Stephen and plotted his death; they viewed Paul even worse: a traitor to the true cause of Judaism, so Paul gets the same treatment.

## ACTS 9:30-31 PAUL RETURNS TO TARSUS: THE CHURCH GROWS

v. 30 Paul returns to Tarsus for the next 7-9 years! It will be Barnabas who seeks him out and brings him back to Antioch (Syria), Acts 11:25-26. When Paul needed a friend in his early years as a believer, Barnabas was there.

v. 31 “then had the church” (singular in the critical texts) “rest throughout” the Palestine area and it was \_\_\_\_\_ (imperfect passive indicative)!

*“BE YE STEADFAST, UNMOVEABLE, ALWAYS ABOUNDING IN THE WORK OF THE LORD.”*