

***International Bible Lessons Commentary***  
***Acts 9:19b-31***

**New American Standard Bible**

***International Bible Lessons***  
**Sunday, October 11, 2015**

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The **[International Bible Lesson](#)** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, October 11, 2015**, is from **Acts 9:19b-31**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** discusses *Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further* to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the **[International Bible Lessons Commentary](#)** website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. If you are a Bible student or teacher, you can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the **[International Bible Lesson Forum](#)**.

***International Bible Lesson Commentary***

**Acts 9:19b-31**

**(Acts 9:19b) Now for several days he was with the disciples who were at Damascus,**

Saul, who persecuted the Christians in Jerusalem and traveled to Damascus to do the same, became the first well-known opponent of Christianity to become a Christian after meeting the resurrected Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus. Saul, who later changed his name to Paul, was blinded from the light when Jesus spoke to him, and after he prayed and fasted for three days, Jesus sent Ananias to him. Ananias laid hands on him, healed his eyes, and the Holy Spirit filled him. Then Paul was baptized and was received by the disciples in Damascus.

**(Acts 9:20) and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.”**

Because Saul was a well-known persecutor of Christians, he had an open door into all of the synagogues in Damascus. The Jews would be eager to hear him because of his reputation. They would be eager to hear Saul teach about Jesus being crucified for blasphemy because Jesus made himself equal to God. They would be eager to learn about the details of how Saul persecuted the Christians who claimed that Jesus was not only the Messiah, but also the Son of God (as Jesus claimed and demonstrated and His Father verified at His resurrection from the dead). Instead of preaching against Jesus, Saul preached exactly what he had experienced and learned about Jesus on the road to Damascus. He preached exactly the truths about Jesus that led the unbelieving Jews to condemn Jesus as worthy of death and influenced Saul to approve the stoning of Stephen. Some of his listeners were amazed at

Saul's new message and new belief in Jesus, and they came to believe in Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God too. Others were amazed at Saul's sudden change of heart and mind, and they began to plot Saul's death.

**(Acts 9:21) All those hearing him continued to be amazed, and were saying, "Is this not he who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name, and who had come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?"**

In the synagogues, Saul's reputation had preceded him. The Jews thought they knew what Saul would say and do when he arrived in Damascus. They knew that many Jews had come to believe the truth about Jesus, and these new Christians had fled from Saul as refugees to Damascus, where many of them attended the synagogues in Damascus and became witnesses for Jesus to all who would listen. They expected Saul to come into their synagogues and prove the Christians wrong, reinforce their false beliefs about Jesus, and imprison those who would not repent and return to Jewish orthodoxy.

**(Acts 9:22) But Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this Jesus is the Christ.**

Instead of taking prisoners back to the chief priests for trial, Saul became more powerful as he preached and argued with unbelieving Jews. The Holy Spirit used Saul's knowledge of the Scriptures to prove that Jesus was the

promised Messiah (the Anointed One they expected based on the prophets' teachings in the Hebrew Scriptures) and the Son of God. Because Saul proved from the Scriptures and sound reasoning that Jesus is who He said He was, the Jews could not defeat Saul through reasoning or by referring to their Scriptures.

**(Acts 9:23) When many days had elapsed, the Jews plotted together to do away with him,**

After Saul succeeded in his arguments about Jesus in the synagogues, the religious leaders took the only recourse left to them: the recourse of silencing Saul once and for all by killing him. This recourse was the same approach Saul had used earlier when he persecuted Christians. He had stood and approved the stoning of Stephen. He was known for his murderous threats, and we do not know how many were murdered with Saul's approval. Ever since the coming of Jesus Christ, when arguments and threats have not worked to silence Christians, they have been killed by unbelievers to stop their influence and their leading others to believe in Jesus.

**(Acts 9:24) but their plot became known to Saul. They were also watching the gates day and night so that they might put him to death;**

When Saul learned of their plot, he went into hiding and ceased teaching in the synagogues. While in hiding, we can easily believe that the Christians continued to pray, fast, encourage one another, and teach as they studied the

Scriptures with the Holy Spirit leading them.

**(Acts 9:25) but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a large basket.**

Saul escaped by being lowered in a basket through an opening in the city wall that was probably a window in a Christian's house that was built into the city wall. Perhaps the house was similar to the house of Rahab that Joshua's spies visited: they escaped Jericho when "she let them down by a rope through a window, for the house she lived in was part of the city wall" (Joshua 2:15). The Holy Spirit led and protected Saul so he could go to Jerusalem as a new Christian and continue the missionary work that Jesus planned for him.

**(Acts 9:26) When he came to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple.**

Saul's reputation in Jerusalem was so horrific that at first the disciples would not welcome him as a disciple. These disciples were followers and students of Jesus, their resurrected Lord, who had become His followers either before or after Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. They probably returned to Jerusalem after they learned Saul had left to persecute Christians in Damascus and elsewhere. They had prior experiences of Saul's persecution and good reasons for not trusting Saul, who

they might have thought had come back to spy on them and persecute more of them. They rightly waited on the leaders of the church, the apostles, to decide whether or not Saul was a true believer and could be trusted.

**(Acts 9:27) But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how at Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus.**

Luke first wrote about Barnabas as the “son of encouragement.” Barnabas sold a field and gave the money to the Church (Acts 4:36). Barnabas knew of Saul’s conversion and he may have witnessed (or learned from other witnesses) how Saul had fearlessly preached about Jesus in the synagogues in Damascus and whenever he had the opportunity. Jesus’ first followers and students were called disciples, and twelve of the disciples who had closely followed Jesus during His public ministry became the twelve apostles. The apostles were the leaders of the first Church. The first Church included new and established believers, who were called disciples. After the disciples in the Church rejected Saul, Barnabas gave his testimony about Saul to the apostles, and his testimony would have included how Saul was accepted and helped by the Christians in Damascus who had come to trust him. After Barnabas’ testimony, the apostles gave their approval of Saul, and Saul was accepted by the disciples (by the Church) as a true disciple too.

**(Acts 9:28) And he was with them, moving about freely in Jerusalem, speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord.**

Since Barnabas was highly respected, the Church accepted Saul for what he claimed about himself and he probably stayed in the homes of various disciples. He would not have been welcomed into the homes of his former friends unless they came to believe in Jesus after hearing Saul's testimony. Saul demonstrated what Barnabas said about him by continuing to speak boldly about Jesus Christ as Lord. He even spoke to the Hellenistic Jews who violently opposed Jesus' followers.

**(Acts 9:29) And he was talking and arguing with the Hellenistic Jews; but they were attempting to put him to death.**

The Hellenistic Jews were Greek speaking Jews and may have included Greeks who had converted to Judaism. Some of the Hellenistic Jews converted to Christianity (see Acts 6). The Hellenistic Jews who had not converted to Christianity and who could not defeat Saul's arguments, but who saw others of their number becoming Christians, wanted to kill Saul to silence him, even as they had silenced Stephen by stoning him.

**(Acts 9:30) But when the brethren learned of it, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus.**

Saul's hometown was Tarsus, a city in what is now modern Turkey, but Saul was raised in Jerusalem where he studied under Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). He may have had relatives in Tarsus that he could share the gospel with after he arrived. Since the church had spread to Tarsus before Saul arrived, he would also have many fellow believers who would mutually encourage one another. Saul would preach with boldness in the synagogues there as he had done in Damascus and among the Hellenistic Jews in Jerusalem.

**(Acts 9:31) So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase.**

One way God brings peace to people is by leading their enemies to a true faith in Jesus Christ, which will include repentance for their sins and a change of behavior. The conversion of Saul illustrates this truth. The Church in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace because no other religious leaders replaced Saul as a primary persecutor of Christians. The Bible teaches: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 9:10 and Psalms 111:10). True respect for the Lord Jesus Christ as the Messiah and the Son of God led the believers to obey the Lord as their Almighty King, to fighting against their temptations to sin, to standing against the devil's schemes, to keep believing when persecuted, to a deeper understanding of the Scriptures, to teaching others about faith in Jesus Christ and the consequences of judgment to come if people reject

Jesus as Lord and Savior. The Holy Spirit encouraged the believers to witness boldly as they preached about Jesus Christ; therefore, many new believers were led to trust in Jesus Christ for salvation and the first Church continued to grow.

### **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further**

1. Name three titles of Jesus that Luke used in this lesson. What do they mean to you personally?
2. If you had been a Jew in Damascus, what are some reasons you could give for believing Saul's teaching in the synagogue and becoming a Christian?
3. Why do you think the unbelieving Jews wanted to kill Saul?
4. Is it okay for a Christian to flee from persecution sometimes? Give a reason for your answer.
5. If you were a Christian in Jerusalem, what are some reasons you could give for trusting that Saul was a true Christian?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.

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