

Acts 053
Many Tribulations
Acts 9:19b-29
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Good evening, everybody. If we could locate Acts 9:19, as we are continuing on with our verse-by-verse study in the Book of Acts. I am at a pivotal point in this study where we are seeing the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, a very instrumental figure in early Christianity, and Christianity in general. What would be missing if we did not have Saul's conversion to Paul? A lot.

At this point he is on the road to Damascus from Jerusalem. Acts 9:1-2 indicates that he had some letters from the high priest to go into the synagogues, where many of the believers in Yeshua or Jesus had fled. He is basically going to take them out of those synagogues in Damascus by force, and haul them back to Jerusalem to be incarcerated. It is just that God had a surprise for Saul.

Saul's Conversion (Acts 9:1-31)

- I. Saul (9:1-31)
 - A. Revelation (1-9)
 - B. Healing (10-19a)
 - C. Preaching (19b-22)
 - 1. Saul's home with the disciples (19b)
 - 2. Saul's preaching (20)
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 - 4. Saul's escape (30)
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He discloses to him a revelation (Acts 9:1-9): *"Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?"* (Acts 9:4). He is temporarily blinded for three days, and then he receives his sight back

(Acts 9:10-19). We pick it up midway through Acts 9:19, and we have Saul of Tarsus involved in his first ministry, where now he goes into those synagogues, and instead of persecuting God's people in the synagogues, he starts to proclaim Jesus. We see the very first Christian preaching of Saul, who is now Paul (Acts 9:19-22).

"Now for several days he was with the disciples who were at Damascus"
(Acts 9:19).

Saul is actually living as a guest in the homes of Christians in Damascus. These were the very people he was persecuting. Now he is dependent upon them for hospitality. That is an interesting turn of events that has happened here. Then you look at Acts 9:20 and you see the first words that come out of his mouth, informal ministry.

"And immediately he [Saul] began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, 'He is the Son of God'" (Acts 9:20).

Notice the word "immediately" here. There is no time for discipleship, necessarily. It is amazing how much he understood in such a short period of time. Later on in these verses—and you have to put the information together from the Book of Galatians—he will be away for three years, personally taught by God. But that had not happened yet.

He was personally taught by God. That is when I think a lot of the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle started to come together for him because he knew, having studied under Gamaliel, a great Jewish scholar (Acts 22:3). He knew what we would call the Old Testament backwards and forwards. He knew Hebrew Bible cold. He just did not understand that Hebrew Bible pointed towards Jesus.

He felt that anyone who made Hebrew Bible point towards Jesus was teaching heresy, but now the scales are off his eyes, both physically and spiritually, because of the influence of the Holy Spirit. Suddenly he is able to see things he could not see before. It is amazing how quickly he saw it, because the three years of discipleship had not even happened yet. That speaks to the power of the Holy Spirit, who is in the business of opening people's eyes to truth.

You might have heard that story about the missionary who came to an unsaved person and tried to share Jesus with the unsaved person. The unsaved person said to the missionary, "I am open to the gospel, but I need ten questions answered first." The missionary looked at his watch and said, "I have an appointment that I cannot break. I'll tell you what, why don't you just receive Christ now and I will come back tomorrow and answer your ten questions?" The person being evangelized said, "You got a deal." He received Christ then and there, and then the missionary came back, as promised, 24 hours later. He said, "I'm here to answer your questions." The man said, "I don't have those questions anymore. They have all been answered."

What happened to that man? He did not get smarter in his own abilities. It is that something greater than himself entered his life. That is one of the things that the Holy

Spirit does. He takes residence in a person's life. Through a ministry called illumination, He opens our minds to things that we could not understand before, particularly spiritual things. Paul will write later on in 1 Corinthians 2:14-15 that the man without the Spirit receiveth not the things that come from the Spirit, because spiritual things are appraised only by the person that is indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus, speaking to Nicodemus, said, "...unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). He cannot see, which means he cannot perceive the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God.

You have to understand that when you are dealing with unsaved people, you are dealing with people that do not have the ability to see what you see. Yelling at them and getting into Facebook wars with them and all this kind of stuff that we do is very fruitless, trying to argue with them. It is like dealing with someone that is blind. You are telling them something is blue and they cannot even perceive blue; or something is yellow and they cannot even perceive yellow; something is red and they cannot even perceive red.

The ultimate reality that people need is the Holy Spirit to come inside of them, which allows them to see spiritual truth. This is essentially what happened with Saul of Tarsus. He is now going into these very same synagogues, and he is proclaiming Jesus. Obviously a light was turned on, and that light is the illuminating presence of the Spirit of God, because he is preaching Jesus with very little time for discipleship.

"And immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues" (Acts 9:20).

He does not go to the Gentiles first. Why does he not go to the Gentiles when we were told back in Acts 9:15 that he was going to be the apostle to the Gentiles? Because Peter, who has the keys of the kingdom, had not yet opened the door of the gospel to the Gentiles. Peter is going to do that in Acts 10. Jesus told Peter that He would give Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and once Peter opens the door, the door stays open. Then Paul will come along after that and be the dominant missionary force to the Gentiles.

In the Book of Romans, Paul gives us his ministry philosophy:

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16).

Once the door is going to be opened to the Gentiles through Peter's evangelization of Cornelius, the door will stay open. Paul, as he will leave the borders of Israel on the three missionary journeys and take the gospel to Rome, will always go to the Jewish synagogue first in a foreign town. He will reason with the Jews from the Scriptures that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah, the Jewish Messiah. He will really experience

limited fruit amongst the Jews in the synagogue, and in most cases, they are going to kick him out of the synagogue.

He will leave and in that same city, wherever he is—he does this in basically every city except in cities that do not have a synagogue, like Philippi, for example—he will leave, and he will reap a tremendous harvest amongst the Gentiles to the jealousy of the unbelieving Jews. They will kick up trouble against him, start rumors against him, try to get him arrested, and a lot of times, try to get him killed. In fact, right here we are going to see two attempts, two conspiracies, immediately develop on his life through the unbelieving Jews right here in Acts 9.

It will push him out of the synagogue in that area, and he will go to the next town, and the same thing will happen. He always goes to the Jew first because they are the chosen people. That is why he is proclaiming Jesus in the synagogues. Back in Acts 9:1-2 he had these letters from the high priest to arrest the Christians in the synagogues—they are not even called Christians yet. Now he is preaching Jesus in the synagogues. It is quite a transition.

Notice the topic of his message in the synagogue: verse 20

"And immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, 'He is the Son of God'" (Acts 9:20).

His topic, his content, is, "Jesus is the Son of God." So that is where he wants to direct the focus. He is not in there to give his personal philosophy of the day. He is there to talk about Jesus Christ and to talk about how Jesus is the Son of God, which is an amazing thing because the phrase "Son of God" applied to Jesus. That is a huge level of growth and understanding immediately, in a short period of time.

Paul looks like he has some kind of grasp of the triunity of God right out of the gate, something he did not understand. If he understood it, he rejected it as an unsaved person. To my knowledge, this is the only place in the Book of Acts where Jesus is called the Son of God. That is what Paul is dealing with here. This is his first ministry after his conversion.

You go down to Acts 9:21 and you see the response of the Jews in the synagogue:

"All those hearing him continued to be amazed, and they 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?'" (Acts 9:21).

Saul's reputation preceded him. They knew all of the murder and trouble he had caused for the early church. They knew why he had left Jerusalem and come to Damascus to arrest these new believers in Yeshua, or Jesus. The world is noticing this 180-degree turn. Maybe not so much the world, but the Hebrews in the synagogue there are

noticing this 180-degree turn. If you are interested in something that will get the attention of people, it is watching people's lives totally change going from being a Christ hater to a Christ promoter. That was a change they saw right before their eyes, and it just astounded them.

Then you go to Acts 9:22 and you see a reference here to Saul's power:.

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

He probably did something similar to what we are going to see him doing in Acts 17 in the Thessalonica area.

"And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ'" (Acts 17:2-3).

Saul, when he went into these synagogues—and here is his first incursion as a new believer, a minister, an apostle, into one of these synagogues—he does not say, "Open your Bible to the Book of Matthew. Let us study today the Book of Romans. Let us study Galatians. Let us study Ephesians." Obviously not, because those books had not been written yet.

The only book on the books, from God's perspective, is what we call Old Testament, a Hebrew Bible. Saul kept demonstrating that Hebrew Bible points towards Jesus, and he kept surfacing the scriptural passages that point to Jesus Christ, showing that Jesus Christ is, in fact, a man of history. He is the only person that has ever entered our world, walked on our path, so to speak, who had a history book written hundreds and thousands of years in advance. That is what the Old Testament essentially is.

When Jesus was walking with the disciples on the Emmaus Road, after He resurrected from the dead, it says, *"He explained to them the things concerning Himself in the Scriptures"* (Luke 24:27). In Luke 24:44, on the Emmaus road, walking with the disciples, He is in His resurrected body. He is showing them the things written about Him in the Law, the prophets, and the Psalms.

Those are the three major divisions of Hebrew Bible. It is called, Tanakh: T, Torah, Law—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy; N, Nevi'im, the Hebrew word for "Prophets"; and K, Kethuvim, Writings—Psalms is used as an abbreviation for the Kethuvim, since the Psalms are the most prominent book in the Kethuvim.

When it says that Jesus showed them the things concerning Himself written in the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms, He is talking about Tanakh—Torah, Nevi'im, Kethuvim—

which is a way of saying the whole Old Testament, what we call Old Testament, pointed toward Him.

That is what makes your Christianity different from any other kind of religion or philosophy that is out there. We are worshiping a risen Savior—crucified and risen—who ministered amongst us for three and a half years, whose whole life was predicted hundreds and thousands of years before He showed up. That is the power of messianic prophecy. This is what Saul of Tarsus, now a convert, is talking about. It is amazing how fast he learned it, because it says back in Acts 9:20, "Immediately."

Saul of Tarsus, when I look at his description in Acts 9:22, how he kept confounding the Jews who lived in Damascus. He reminds me an awful lot of a gentleman that we are going to run into in the book the Book of Acts named Apollos.

"Now a Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the Scriptures" (Acts 18:24).

That is how Apollos is described: *"he was mighty in the Scriptures."* That is what Paul was like right out of the gate. He was mighty in the Scriptures. He knew the Scriptures. It is just that now he knew in which direction they pointed. That is what he was blind to before. They are pointing to Yeshua, or Jesus Christ.

The three-year excursion that he had into Arabia had not happened yet. These are things that the Holy Spirit showed him immediately through illumination. Do not underestimate the power of the Holy Spirit's illumination. First John describes that illumination:

"But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know" (1 John 2:20).

"As for you, the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him" (1 John 2:27).

When it says that you have an anointing that resides within you, the Holy Spirit, *"and you have no need for anyone to teach you"* it is not downing the legitimate spiritual gift of teaching within the church. That is a Spirit-given gift, as well. What it is downing is this gnostic mindset that many of the early Christians were under, where you had to go through some kind of secret knowledge to get to the truth.

Those are what are called the Gnostic. Gnostic, coming from the word "gnosis," secret knowledge. "What you have in Christ is not enough. You have to come through our system to get complete knowledge." John is saying, "No, you do not need that. You do not need a secret knowledge. What you need is to access the Holy Spirit who is already inside of you."

That is what happened to Saul of Tarsus. His eyes are open physically. His eyes are open spiritually. He is understanding trinitarianism. He is understanding messianic prophecy to the point where he is actually contesting the Jewish leadership in the synagogues. There he is in Damascus, and he wants to continue there, but what we discover is there is a conspiracy developed against him (Acts 9:23-25).

Immediately, the man's life is threatened. Immediately, we see that he is so effective at his ministry that the unbelieving Jews want to kill him. You see the plot against him:

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

Now you look back at Acts 9:20, where it says, *"immediately."* Then you look at Acts 9:23, where it says, *"When many days had elapsed."* The Greek in Acts 9:23 means "after a long time." Why does it say "immediately" in Acts 9:20, and "after a long time" in Acts 9:23? Probably this is where you put his three-year absence.

By the time you leave Acts 9:22, he was taken away for three years by God. By the time you get to the beginning of Acts 9:23, the three-year period, where God taught him personally, has already taken place. That time period is likely described in the Book of Galatians. Paul writes:

"But when God, who had set me apart from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, nor did I go to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia and returned once more to Damascus" (Galatians 1:15-17).

He has been away in Arabia, and he has come back to Damascus. That is where we are picking it up there in Acts 9:23. That is why it says, *"When many days had elapsed."*

"Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days" (Galatians 1:18).

Why would Paul give us all of this biographical information in the Book of Galatians? His doctrine was so grace-oriented, that a lot of people said, "We just cannot believe what Paul is saying. Who does he think he is, an apostle or something?" This happened particularly when he combated the legalists in the churches.

They came into the churches demanding that the church go back under the Mosaic Law for purposes of growth and sanctification. Paul says, "You do not need that. You are not justified by the Mosaic Law. You are not sanctified by the Mosaic Law." People, whose whole lives revolved around the Mosaic Law and were trying to put the church under the Mosaic Law, hated Paul's message.

One of the ways they tried to take away from Paul's message was by arguing that Paul was not a true apostle. "He was not one of the original Twelve. Do not listen to him." So Paul has to give his biography in Galatians 1, explaining how he actually became an apostle. He narrates a lot of this history that we are reading about in Acts 9.

Then he explains how the Lord took him for a three-year period of time, and personally taught him. He began to develop an understanding, even above and beyond what we are reading about here, in his initial ministry in the synagogues in Damascus; How the things that the Lord taught him were completely on par with what the apostles in Jerusalem already understood.

It would be one thing to say, "The Lord taught me for three years personally," and then come up with some doctrine that nobody has ever heard of before. But Paul and the apostles were on the same page theologically, even though it was Jesus that taught the apostles the original Twelve and it was the Lord who personally taught Paul in Arabia and other places for a period of three years.

That is why he gives all of his history there, biographically. In Galatians chapter one, he is trying to show that his ministry is just as legitimate as Peter's. Therefore, when he talks about the grace of God, "You cannot discount me by saying I am not a real apostle. I am a real apostle. I was born out of due season. I was not one of the original Twelve, but I really did have an encounter with Jesus on the Damascus Road. I was nurtured doctrinally by God Himself."

It was not some weird dream or something, because according to my doctrinal understanding, by the time that three-year process was over, it was equivalent to what Jesus had shown the original Twelve. He has probably left and then come back there before you even get to Acts 9:23.

At any rate, the Jews were not happy with the man's ministry and his Christ-mindedness, because it says, *"the Jews plotted together to do away with him"* (Acts 9:23). There you see the very beginning of the first plot or persecution against Paul. There are going to be many such persecutions against Paul, plots to kill the man, in the Book of Acts. That is why he would write to Timothy:

"Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Timothy 3:12, RSV).

He experienced that. Jesus said to the disciples in the Upper Room:

"If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you" (John 15:18).

In other words, "Do not take it personally. If they hate you, keep in mind that they hated Me long before they hated you. The only reason they hate you is they see Me and you."

"If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also" (John 15:19-20).

You would think, with his conversion and being taught for three years by God Himself, by the time he made it back to Damascus, you would think the unbelieving Jews would applaud and say, "Congratulations on your training. We cannot wait to hear everything you have got to say." Instead, they want the man dead.

As you are executing your ministry wherever God has you, and if everybody does not stand up and applaud your advocacy of Jesus Christ, do not think that somehow you have missed the boat or you are doing the wrong kind of thing. It could be that you are exactly where God wants you. You are just fitting into a divine pattern that Paul himself fit into, that Jesus said all true disciples would fit into.

He becomes aware of their plot and takes some precautions: *"but their plot became known to Saul"* (Acts 9:24). He is able to get himself out of harm's way. We will see that in a second, but notice how they are trying to execute this plot against him: "[The Jews] plotted together to do away with him" (Acts 9:23), and, *"They were also watching the gates day and night so that they might put him to death"* (Acts 9:24). All they were doing was watching in Damascus, where he typically came in and where he typically went out. They were looking for any visible presence of him so they could kill him immediately.

There are people that are like that in our world. I think a lot of it is motivated by jealousy, particularly when God starts to use you. They will sit and monitor every little thing you do, particularly on social media, or YouTube. With me, they just sit and wait for any little mistake I make. That is not hard to find; I make mistakes, I misspeak, I say one thing when I mean something else. If I make a mistake, I usually say, "It is not the first mistake I have made. It certainly will not be the last." I usually go back and try to correct it.

What they want to do is to capture you saying one little thing that seems to be off so they can make a video about you and spread it all over the place and try to discredit you. That is the nature of this business that we are called to in Christianity, Christian ministry, Christian leadership. At some point you have to ask yourself, "What is their problem?" I do not even know these people. I have never even had a one-on-one, face-to-face interaction with them. Why do they have this "I am going to lie and prey and look for any type of problem so I can discredit so-and-so"?

Why are they doing it? A lot of it, to be frank with you, is just jealousy, or some kind of hatred that they have of something coming out of your mouth, which is not even your

original idea, it is the Lord's. We are not really here to give our own ideas. There is such a hatred for the things of God that they seek to discredit those that God is using.

In Paul's case, they were trying to take the man out. So there they are, hiding in Damascus, watching the gates, waiting for him to show up so that they could execute their plot of executing Paul. Fortunately for Saul, who is becoming Paul, God provides the way of escape:

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

It is interesting that he is helped by the disciples. Remember that originally he came to Damascus the first time to destroy the disciples. Now the very people that he came to destroy (Acts 9:1-2) are protecting him from destruction. It is an interesting turn of events. This business about being lowered down from a wall in a basket, he actually makes reference to this elsewhere in his writings.

"In Damascus the ethnarch under Aretas the king was guarding the city of the Damascenes [those that dwelt in Damascus] in order to seize me, and I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and so escaped his hands" (2 Corinthians 11:32-33).

You might remember the Book of Joshua with Rahab the harlot hiding the spies. A similar thing happened in that situation.

"Then she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house was on the city wall, so that she was living on the wall" (Joshua 2:15).

This is how Rahab the harlot deceived the Canaanite authorities by hiding the spies. The same kind of thing is happening here to Saul, and so he is protected from destruction by those he originally came to Damascus to destroy.

It is at this point that he goes back to the city of Jerusalem:

"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" (Acts 9:26).

This is probably the same time period that is mentioned in Galatians 1:18-20:

"Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas [the Aramaic name for Peter], and stayed with him fifteen days. But I did not see any of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother" (Galatians 1:18-19).

What you are reading there in Acts 9:26, he writes about in Galatians 1:18-20.

At this point he is leaving Damascus up north, and he is traveling back to the city of Jerusalem. The rest of the disciples, once he made it back to Jerusalem, did not want anything to do with him. Except what does he say here? Peter and James. No one else wanted anything to do with the guy. Why? Because they knew his reputation.

This is a man that was persecuting Christians, and they thought the guy was just going to come back and do the same thing. They had no idea of his conversion. If they had some idea of it, they did not believe it was true. They were really standoffish towards him as he left Damascus and made his way back to Jerusalem, but Barnabas takes Saul and brings him to the apostles. When nobody believed in Paul except for a small handful, Barnabas did.

We actually need people like that in our lives. We need people in our lives that will believe in us or believe us when no one else will. We need people in our lives that will see the potential in us when no one else sees it. There have been countless examples like this in my life, where God has raised up a Barnabas and sees in me something that no one else can see, and will take me by the hand and guide me to the right place where I need to be at that particular time in my life. Thank God for Barnabas.

Do you know what Barnabas means? It means "son of exhortation or consolation." Barnabas really lived up to his name, some would call it the "son of encouragement." When Paul came back to Jerusalem, and most of the apostles wanted nothing to do with Saul, Barnabas believed him and connected him with the rest of the apostles. We read about it here:

"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" (Acts 9:27).

With very few exceptions, nobody wanted to accept the apostleship of Paul within the circle of believers, but Barnabas did. Barnabas explained that this man saw Jesus Christ on the Damascus Road, that Jesus had spoken to Paul, and that Paul had actually preached Jesus in the Damascus synagogues. How much of that did Barnabas see? We are not told. As far as I can tell, we are not even told he was there in Damascus.

It is almost as if Barnabas, the son of exhortation, had to accept all of these things by faith, but he believed in the testimony of Saul when most of the believers wanted nothing to do with Saul. That is what makes Barnabas such a special person.

We need those kinds of people in our lives. You should pray that God will raise up in your life a Barnabas, and you should pray about the opportunity of being used like Barnabas in someone else's life, living up to that name, "son of exhortation, son of consolation."

He seems to be talking about this experience in Galatians 1:18-20, again, laying out his biography:

"Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem and became acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days. But I did not see any of the other apostles except for James..." (Galatians 1:18-19).

Why does Barnabas keep mentioning the fact that, "We need to take this man at his word? He has actually seen the Lord on the road to Damascus." Of all of the things he could have highlighted about Saul, who is becoming Paul here, why does Barnabas highlight the fact that, "We need to believe this man, that he has actually seen the Lord in a vision on the Damascus Road"?

The reason Barnabas is emphasizing that is because that is the criteria that must be met for someone to call themselves an apostle. All the way back in Acts 1:21-22, when they were trying to figure out who was going to replace Judas, who had committed suicide. They needed twelve, so they ended up picking this guy named Matthias to replace Judas. The criteria for apostleship is given there in Acts 1:21-22:

"Therefore it is necessary that of the men who have who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us—beginning with the baptism of John until the day He was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection" (Acts 1:21-22).

You want to be an apostle on the ground floor of the Church Age? Then there are some criteria that must be met. One of those criteria is that you must have seen the risen Christ.

When I was teaching at the Bible College, a lot of the students would introduce themselves as, "I am Apostle so and so," and I would always say, "You look you look good for your age, because you should be about 2,000 years old by now." Sometimes a little humor is better than just hitting people over the head with a two by four.

The problem is, Paul never saw the risen Jesus Christ. He was not there during the three and a half year ministry of Jesus. By the time Saul of Tarsus was converted, Jesus had already ascended. So how can Saul call himself an apostle? He did see Jesus through a vision on the Damascus Road. That is why Barnabas is emphasizing that this is a man that saw the risen Jesus, so he is an apostle. He is an apostle born out of due season, but he is an apostle nonetheless.

Paul will write about his apostleship in 1 Corinthians 15:8-9: *"and last of all, as to one untimely born,"* meaning, "I am not like the others. I was not there with Jesus during His earthly ministry. I was not even converted until after Jesus ascended back to heaven,

but I am still an apostle because I saw Him in a vision on the Damascus Road. In fact, He talked to me and He said to me, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?'"

"And last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. For I am the least of the apostles, and am not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God" (1 Corinthians 15:8-9).

God took someone that was persecuting His people and made him the last apostle to come into the fold by fulfilling that criterion of giving him this vision on the Damascus Road. We know that this vision was true because by the time he was taught by the Lord for three years, his doctrine harmonized with that of the other apostles.

It would be one thing to have a vision—a lot of people claim they have visions, claim to be apostles—and then to be teaching something diametrically opposed to what the other apostles were teaching. That was not the case of Saul, who became Paul. His doctrine aligned with them perfectly, as he explains in the Book of Galatians.

Barnabas is a special person because he believed Saul's testimony when almost none of the rest of them would. He took him by the hand and brought him to the rest of the apostles, and said, "God talked to this guy. This guy has seen Jesus. This guy in Damascus had a ministry where he went into the synagogues and was defending how the Scriptures point to Jesus, and he was actually talking about Jesus as the Son of God."

I am not sure Barnabas was there to witness those things. I do not know why he did it, but he believes Saul when no one else would. It is a tremendous ministry, if God has someone in your life like that, or you become that for somebody else. There is nothing more painful than being isolated by the Christian world. To have that minority or those one or two people to come alongside and say, "I believe you. I believe in you." It is such a powerful ministry. I wonder where Saul of Tarsus would have ended up had Barnabas not intervened as he did here. He certainly, to my mind, would not have been as powerful and as effective as he became.

Next you see Saul's initial ministry in Jerusalem. Even before we get to that, did you notice the reference there to the name of Christ and the end of Acts 9:27, "*boldly in the name of the Lord*"? I think we have seen a few other references to that:

"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...?'" (Acts 9:21).

It is the Greek word "onoma." I think in this section there are a number of references to the name of Christ. Why does it keep mentioning the name of Christ? Because it relates to something Peter said all the way back in Acts 4:12:

"And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name ["onoma"] under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

There is a view out there that you just give them some spiritual talk. You do not get into the Jesus thing too much. Be seeker friendly. If you do that on a Sunday morning, maybe on a Wednesday night, they will come back and ask about Jesus. That is the seeker friendly philosophy of ministry. It is a ministry philosophy that we reject here at Sugar Land Bible Church.

Here at Sugar Land Bible Church, we do not just talk about spiritual things, we talk about the name of Jesus Christ, which is the most powerful name that ever can be uttered:

"...and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth" (Philippians 2:9-10).

At the name of Jesus all will bow. The name Jesus is a game changer. Our culture, with its spiritual talk, is really comfortable with "God language" until you interject the name of Jesus. Try that in your workplace or in your family, if they are unbelievers or whatever, as they are talking about all this "God talk," spiritual talk. Throw in the name Jesus and watch the reaction of people. It is a game changer.

All of a sudden, everybody gets really uncomfortable with the name Jesus. Everybody is comfortable with saying, "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life" and "I am glad you found spiritual enlightenment in your particular guru." You say, "You know what? I am who I am today because of Jesus." Oops. It is as if you just turned a flashlight on in a dark room.

You see here in Saul's ministry, and even as Barnabas is talking about Saul's ministry, this word "onoma," the name of Jesus.

Saul, at this point, has a ministry in Jerusalem. First he has a ministry among the apostles:

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

This is probably that fifteen-day period in Jerusalem that he talks about in Galatians 1:18: *"Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days."* It is probably during that time period.

You will notice that Saul is bold no matter where he goes. When he is with the apostles, he is bold. When he is with the Jews in the synagogue, he is bold. This explains why he would say this to Timothy years later:

"For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline" (2 Timothy 1:7).

The Spirit of God inside of a person will make him bold as a lion. In fact, the Book of Proverbs talks about that. The unsaved, the unrighteous flee when no one's chasing them, but by contrast, in other words, the righteous are as bold as a lion (Proverbs 28:1).

When I feel God is calling me to do something and I go into fear—"Share your faith with so and so next to you on the bus or wherever"—and I go into fear. "They are going to think I am weird. They are going to think I am a right-wing extremist. They are going to reject me." "I want you to teach this Bible study." "I do not know, Lord, if people are going to accept it."

When I start feeling those kinds of feelings, I know exactly where they are coming from. They are not coming from the Holy Spirit—they are coming from my sin nature or the demonic world, or both. The Spirit that God has given us is not a spirit of timidity. If I am feeling afraid, I cannot blame that on God, because God has given me, all of us, not a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power. That is what Paul is walking in here.

Acts 9:29 is his ministry now amongst the unsaved in Jerusalem:

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

Wait a minute, I thought they were trying to put him to death earlier in the chapter? Yes, that is round one. Now we are reading about the second round.

Who are these Hellenistic Jews? These are the Diaspora Jews. You might remember the first time we read about them was in the Acts 6:1:

"Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint rose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food" (Acts 6:1).

There were native Jews in Jerusalem, native Hebrews. There were those that had been scattered in what is called the Diaspora and had come to Jerusalem for a particular feast day—the day of Pentecost. Some of them apparently got saved and became part of the church (Acts 6:1). But a lot of them stayed unsaved. There is Paul arguing with these Diaspora Jews. First, he is bold amongst the apostles, and now he is bold amongst the Diaspora Jews, the Hellenistic Jews.

Stephen, you remember, was arguing with those people. Stephen, the first martyr of the Church Age, a deacon:

"But some men from what was called the Synagogue of the Freedmen, including Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and some from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and argued with Stephen" (Acts 6:9).

The same Diaspora Jews that were disputing with Stephen, Saul is now disputing with them in Jerusalem, as well. He must be doing a good job amongst those folks. How do I know he is doing a good job amongst those folks? Because they want to kill him, that is why: *"but they were attempting to put him to death" (Acts 9:29)*. Remember what happened to him in Damascus? *"The Jews plotted together to do away with him" (Acts 9:23)*.

They want him dead in Damascus, so he escapes, being lowered down through the basket. He goes back to Jerusalem, and he is arguing with these Hellenistic, or Diaspora Jews. The end of Acts 9:29 says, *"...but they were attempting to put him to death."*

I have a personality where I wish everybody liked me. I really wish that. I wish everybody was my buddy, but my wife reminds me frequently, "If you are not making someone mad, you are probably not doing it right." It is the nature of ministry. It is the nature of truth that divides.

Jesus, in Matthew ten, as He is sending out His disciples to offer the kingdom to Israel, talked about this:

"I did not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10:34).

"I came to bring divisions within a family." He starts listing the different divisions in a family. One of them cracks me up. He says, "I came to bring a division between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law" (Matthew 10:35). I am thinking to myself, "That already exists anyway."

All of that to say, if you are out there for Jesus—I am not talking about being obnoxious, but you are speaking the truth in love—and you are not received, and in fact, you are opposed, do not think that you have missed God or you are out of God's will. Here is Saul as a brand new Christian, and there have been two attempts on his life, two conspiracies developed to kill him.

We will see his escape from conspiracy number two (Acts 9:30). We will get a progress report on the church (Acts 9:31). Then Peter will move into action (Acts 9:32). Peter is the guy that is going to take the gospel to the Gentiles. He is going to lead the first Gentiles to Christ, Cornelius and his entourage.

Peter is going to turn the key, and the door is going to be open now to the Gentiles, opening up the opportunity for Saul, who will become Paul, to become the apostle to the Gentiles that he was called by God to be back in Acts 9:15.