

“Chosen to Preach and Suffer for Christ” Acts 9:19b–31

Introduction

Our goal is to encourage you all to “take heed to yourself and the doctrine” (1 Tim 4:16). My task is to encourage you towards that end from Acts 9:19b–31. Along the way, I will attempt to preach through an NT narrative in a way that fits with how Brother Thomas will teach us to preach through an OT narrative. Then he’ll actually preach an OT narrative. Brother Saxon will show us a pastor from church history whose way of preaching we should imitate (cf. Heb 13:7). Brother McAllister will encourage us to take heed to doctrine and ourselves two times throughout the day. Let’s turn our attention to Acts 9.

The Contribution of Acts to the Overarching Story of the Bible

God has always wanted us to enjoy Him as our loving King, ruling over us and fellowshiping with us forever. Thanks to Christ, the grand end of the story of the Bible is found in God’s voice from His throne in Revelation 21:3: “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.”

After creation, sin, the law, and then the life of our Lord (including His ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven), Acts records Christ’s sending of the Spirit and then the first 30 years of how Christ used the apostles and Christians in general to call people into His glorious church, citizens of His coming kingdom (cf. Acts 1:3).

Acts 9:19b–31 in the Book of Acts

The Book of Acts is important because, just as the Gospel of Luke records “all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1; cf. Luke 1:1–4), so also the Book of Acts tells us all that Jesus *continued to do and teach*—this time, *through the apostles and early church in the power of the Holy Spirit*.

Acts 1:8 roughly outlines the book: through the Spirit’s power, the apostles would be Christ’s witnesses in Jerusalem (Acts 1–7), in all Judea and Samaria (Acts 8), and to the end of the earth (Acts 9–28).

Subthemes include the “sermons” of Peter, Stephen, and Paul, Jerusalem’s struggle with Gentile inclusion in the church, and persecution and relief. Perhaps Luke also intends to show the peaceful nature of the church in spite of its interaction with civil authorities. Whereas Peter was the primary apostle to the Jews in Jerusalem (Acts 1–8), so Paul was the primary apostle to the Gentiles, taking the gospel to the uttermost end of the earth (Acts 9–28), even to the most powerful ruler in the known world at the time—Caesar, the emperor of Rome (cf. Acts 25:11; 28:19).

Acts 9:19b–31 tells us of what Christ did through the apostle Paul by the power of the Spirit when his apostolic ministry first began.

So, (1) let’s look to Luke’s description of the early years of Paul, (2) see what Luke has for us to consider as this passage sits in Acts and (3) focus on Paul’s example to encourage us today.

1. First, let's see the story in three movements, highlighting and explaining pertinent parts of the text.

a. Movement #1: Preaching and Persecution in Damascus (9:19b–25)

i. **Paul preached (Acts 9:19–20).** However long Luke means some days to be, they were at least long enough to have immediately proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, specifically that He is the Son of God.

1. Immediately:

a. While anyone today should share the gospel immediately after conversion, a pastor “must not be a recent convert” (1 Tim 3:6). The apostles had something like this in their requirement for one to “have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us” (Acts 1:21–22). For Paul, however, he was “one untimely born” (1 Cor 15:8) among the apostles but nonetheless called by Christ and appointed to his ministry.

b. Along with this unique grace was a filling of the Spirit (Acts 9:17) that, I believe, in distinction from Paul's command (Eph 5:18) and Luke's descriptions of character and joy (Acts 6:3; 11:23–24; 13:52), was maybe something in keeping with the fillings of Elizabeth, Zechariah, Peter, and Stephen in Luke/Acts (Luke 1:41, 67; Acts 4:8; 6:10). At the very least, it was similar to the Holy Spirit's filling to give the church great boldness in their evangelistic witness (Acts 4:31).

2. He is Son of God: This is Luke's snapshot of what he records more fully in Paul's sermons (e.g., Acts 13:16–47; 17:22–31). As promised by the prophets, Jesus is more than just an earthly King and, indeed, the Son of God—the risen Lord who shows His divine power by governing His church through the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom 1:1–4).

ii. **The people were perplexed (9:21).** Having heard him, all were amazed, noting how he made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name and his more recent purpose of coming to Damascus to bring them bound before the chief priests.

1. Havoc in Jerusalem: See, e.g., Acts 8:1–3.

2. Purpose: See Acts 9:1–2.

- iii. **Paul preached all the more (9:22).** He increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews there by proving that Jesus was the Christ.
1. Increased in strength: This verb (ἐνδυναμόω) is used once here by Luke and regularly by Paul to speak of what comes by faith (Rom 4:20) and from the grace and strength of Christ that enables us to do all things (Eph 6:10; Phil 4:13; 1 Tim 1:12; 2:1; 4:17).
 2. Confounded: Paul’s refutation of the Jews undid them. Only Luke uses this verb (συγχέω; 5x), translated elsewhere as “bewildered” and “confusion” (Acts 2:6; 19:32; 21:28, 31).
 3. Proving: These proofs would have matched OT promises to their fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Perhaps as in his sermon in Acts 13, Paul spoke of Jesus as David’s descendant, the one to whom John the Baptist pointed, the One who suffered according to what the prophets had written, God’s royal Son from Ps 2:7, the One who arose according to Isa 55:3 and Ps 16:10, the one who frees us from the Law of Moses, etc. In short, Jesus was the Christ, the OT Messiah to come.
- iv. **So the Jews plotted his murder (9:23–25).**
1. When many days had passed means three years between his time in Damascus and Jerusalem, including his time in Arabia that Luke does not record (Gal 1:17–18). These years ended in Damascus, with a story that Paul told in 2 Cor 11:32–33 as well—the governor under King Aretas tried to capture Paul.
 2. Here in Acts, the Jews plotted to kill him, so both the Jews and governor were involved. In both Acts and 2 Corinthians, they were watching the gates (the governor was guarding the city), Paul escaped by night, through an opening in the wall (a window), and in a basket.
- b. Movement #2: Preaching and Persecution in Jerusalem (9:26–30).**
- i. **His Attempt to Join the Disciples (9:26).** In Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. Naturally, the disciples were all afraid him; they did not believe that he was a disciple.
 - ii. **His Advocate to Join the Disciples (9:27):** Barnabas, however, apparently believed Paul had seen the Lord and, perhaps along with the testimony of others, that Paul at Damascus preached boldly in the name of Jesus.

- iii. **His Audacity as a Disciple (9:28):** As a result, Paul freely went in and out among them, again preaching boldly in the name of the Lord.
1. One lexicon describes the act of preaching boldly as to “speak freely, openly, fearlessly” (BDAG). Similarly, when the noun *boldness* is used, it can mean “courage, confidence, boldness, fearlessness” (BDAG).
 2. From Acts, *preaching boldly* and *boldness* is something that marked the preaching of the gospel by the apostles (Acts 2:29; 4:13; 9:27, 28; 13:46; 14:3; 18:26; 19:8; 26:26; 28:31). The whole church prayed for this boldness and spoke accordingly as well (Acts 4:29, 31). Paul requested others to pray that his preaching would be with boldness, “as I ought to speak” (Eph 6:19–20).
 3. Preaching boldly is an open, fearless, courageous, and confident manner of preaching. It stems from a love for God, a conviction concerning His truth, and an intense desire to see it savingly at work in the hearts of those who hear it.
- iv. **Antagonism Against Him as a Disciple (9:29–30):** His bold preaching here was that he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists. In response, they were seeking to kill him. So, the brothers brought him up and north directionally but down topographically to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus further northwest. We don’t see him again until Acts 11:25–30, 12:25, and then finally center-stage in chapters 13–28.
1. Disputed (συζητέω): This is “to contend with persistence for a point of view, *dispute, debate, argue*” (BDAG).
 2. Hellenists: These were Greek-speaking Jews, the kind of people that opposed Stephen and disputed (same verb) with him (cf. Acts 6:9). Paul has come full circle.
 3. Acts 22:17–21 gives further info, that Paul had a vision from Christ in the temple at this time commanding him to go far away to the Gentiles.
 4. Tarsus: His time here was roughly AD 37–45. If he wrote 2 Corinthians in AD 56, his vision of heaven fourteen years prior was in AD 42 (cf. 2 Cor 12:1–4).
 5. These are often called Paul’s “silent years,” the years of his ministry about which the Bible is mostly silent.

c. Movement #3: Peace and Progress for All the Church (9:31).

With the conversion of the church's chief persecutor, it had peace, was being built up. And, thanks also to walking in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.

- i. So stems from $\mu\grave{\epsilon}\nu\ \omicron\upsilon\breve{\nu}$, which “denotes continuation” (BDAG). What follows is chronologically next but also functions as a summary statement not just for 9:19b–31 or even 9:1–31 but all the way back to 6:8. The last summary statement was in 6:7. Cf. 2:42–47; 4:32–35; 5:12–16, 42; 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:6 (also uses $\mu\grave{\epsilon}\nu\ \omicron\upsilon\breve{\nu}$); 19:20.
- ii. As to the content of 9:31, it is technically one big sentence. The text states literally, “So then, the church throughout all of Judea and Galilee and Samaria was having peace, being built up and walking in the fear of the Lord; and in the comfort of the Spirit, it multiplied.”
- iii. The church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria recalls 1:8, which moves us to anticipate how Luke will record the gospel’s spread to the uttermost ends of the earth. God connects Peter with Cornelius (Acts 10), has Jerusalem hear about it (Acts 11), knocks Herod out of the way (Acts 12), and then sends Paul off the Gentiles (Acts 13–28).
- iv. For the moment, though, God gave the gift of peace by turning a villain of God into a voice for the gospel that resulted in the church (i.e., the historical church, not just local) being built up by Him, the implied Actor of the passive verb. If we take and walking with being built up, we move from God’s peacetime action to the church’s—walking in the fear of the Lord, and thankfully for the moment, not the fear of man.
- v. Additionally, by means of the comfort of the Holy Spirit, the work of the Spirit among God’s people, the church grew not only in quality but in quantity as well—it multiplied. Those two types of growth usually go hand-in-hand.

2. Second, let's see seven reasons why Luke included this story in Acts.

Acts is just as “orderly” in its “account for... Theophilus” as the Gospel of Luke with its many literary themes (Luke 1:3; cf. Acts 1:1–3).

- a. First, perhaps we see **an ironic reversal** of roles as Paul take Stephen's place.
- b. Second, in God's providence, we see **Paul's initial relationship with Barnabas**, one that would reconvene in Antioch and continue through Acts 13–15.
- c. Third, in keeping with his calling (Acts 9:15), Paul **carried Christ's name** before the Gentiles (Arabia, Tarsus), kings (Aretas), and the children of Israel (synagogues).
- d. Fourth, in keeping with his calling (Acts 9:16), Paul also **suffered** the threat of death in Damascus and Jerusalem for the sake of Christ's name.
- e. Fifth, In showing the **unity between the Jews and Gentiles** in the early church (an ongoing matter to work out—cf. chs. 10, 11, 15), Paul spent time in Jerusalem early in his ministry.
- f. Sixth, in keeping with **Acts 1:8**, the church has flourished in **Jerusalem** (cf. 6:7) and now in Judea and **Samaria** (cf. 9:31). The **ends of the earth** are next in Acts.
- g. Seventh, in showing what Christ continued to do and teach after His resurrection and that through the Holy Spirit's work in the apostles whom He had chosen (Acts 1:1–2), Luke records how Christ sovereignly, personally, and mercifully called the church's foremost persecutor to be His Spirit-filled, chief apostle to the uttermost ends of the earth. This is how **Jesus Christ built His church then**, so we should have no doubts that **He will continue to build it today**.

3. Third, let's see the implications of this passage, how it applies to everyday life. Of many we could mention, we will focus on just three.

- a. From **the example of the church** in Acts 9, we know that persecution will come, but Christ also sees the church suffer and gives it rest in order to thrive again. In fact, we are to pray that civil leaders would administrate peace for us to live in such a way that carries out God's desire for the salvation of all men (1 Tim 2:1–7). At the very least, He rewards us for suffering like Him, even dying if He deems fit.
- b. From **the example of Paul as a convert** in Acts 9, we remember that Christ is perfectly patient towards all who come to believe in Him for eternal life. As Paul himself said, “The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life” (1 Timothy 1:15–16).

- c. From **the example of Paul as a minister of the gospel** in Acts 9, we remember that a call to ministry is a call to suffer and preach.
- i. As the OT was written for our instruction today (Rom 15:4), so also the NT was written for our instruction as well. Paul commanded others to imitate him (1 Cor 4:15–16; Phil 3:17; cf. 1 Thess 1:6; 2 Thess 3:9), and, for Timothy who as a minister of the gospel, to follow his ways as well. As pastors, Acts 9:19b–31 gives us an informative, illuminating, and memorable illustration to encourage our obedience to several commands Paul left for us today.
 - ii. **Suffering**
 1. 2 Timothy 1:8–9⁸ Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God,⁹ who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began,
 2. 2 Timothy 3:10–11¹⁰ You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness,¹¹ my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me.

iii. **Preaching**

1. 2 Timothy 1:13–14¹³ Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.¹⁴ By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.
2. 2 Timothy 3:14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it.
3. Paul proclaimed (9:20), increased all the more in strength, confounded (9:22), preached boldly (9:27, 28), spoke, and _____ (9:29). These actions are ours today: “He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it” (Titus 1:9).

Conclusion

If Christ can show mercy to His church by turning an antagonist into an apostle, certainly He can build His church through you and me in any situation today. Whether in persecution or in peace, may we continue to make disciples of all nations until He comes again.