

SUNDAY SCHOOL MATERIALS FOR ADULTS

LESSON 3



PAUL BEGINS HIS MINISTRY

Scripture Text: Acts 9:23-31

Saul, later named Paul, successfully proved Jesus' deity to the Jews at Damascus. Not wanting to believe this, they were greatly angered. In **Galatians 1:15-18** Paul tells us that following his conversion, he went into Arabia. He went to commune with God and meditate that he might rightly understand the Truth of the Gospel which had been revealed to him and which he was to preach. Then he returned again unto Damascus. The three years of **verse 18** probably cover his stay in Arabia and his preaching in Damascus.

Paul's taking of his teaching of Christ's deity from Damascus to the Jewish synagogue brought great opposition and persecution. We reap as we sow. Barnabas was a loving Christian brother.

MEMORY VERSE: Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.

—2 Timothy 4:2

DAILY READINGS:

Mon.—**Romans 8:28-39** More than conquerors.

Tue.—**Ephesians 3:8-21** According to eternal purpose.

Wed.—**2 Timothy 1:7-14** Called with a holy calling.

Thu.—**1 Peter 1:10-23** Be holy in conduct.

Fri.—**Ephesians 1:3-14** Chosen to be holy.

Devotional Reading: Matthew 24:3-14 Endure to the end.

Paul Escapes Danger

Acts 9:23-25 Paul took his teaching of Christ's deity to the point of greatest opposition, the Jewish synagogue. After **many days** this brought great persecution. **The Jews took counsel to kill him.** Determined to accomplish this end, **they watched the gates day and night.** Paul knew this. It must have been a frightening game of hide-and-seek until Paul's brethren **took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket.** As Paul quickly climbed out of the basket in the dark and started the long trip to Jerusalem (some one hundred sixty miles), he must have been thinking of times when he had been the persecutor rather than the persecuted. He was reaping what he had sowed. While he patiently reaped, he was sowing better seed for a joyous reaping that is even now continuing.

Paul at Jerusalem

Acts 9:26-28 Paul came back to Jerusalem a different man than left. He is one of the clearest examples we have of the Truth that **if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature (2 Corinthians 5:17).** Reaching Jerusalem, Paul **assayed to join himself to the disciples**—tried to fellowship with them. He was one of them now. **But they were all afraid**—they knew his former activity among them. They believed this to be some kind of trick, what we would call infiltration today. **But Barnabas** lovingly **brought him to the apostles,** told of his experience with the Lord and his preaching at Damascus. They were convinced. They accepted Paul, **and he was with them coming in and going out**—moved with them freely.

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Yes, Paul was a changed man. The change in him was more evident because of the public character of his wickedness and later of his preaching. Yet every redeemed soul is as much a new creature. If one is not a new being, there has been no new birth. When the sinner dies and the saint is born, the life has a new Source, new Master, new purposes and loves, and a new destiny.

We discern the character of Barnabas in the fact that when no one else had any faith in Saul's sincerity and testimony, he trusted him and went out of his way to help him. There was no man to whom Paul owed so much as he did to his loving brother, Barnabas. Since Paul was to mean so much to Christianity through the ages, the part Barnabas played in bridging the gap between Paul and the Apostles and the church was a bright jewel in his crown of Christian service.

Brethren Concerned

Acts 9:29-30 Paul, coming in and going out, spoke boldly—it took courage—in the name of the Lord Jesus. One purpose filled his life now, and by God's grace, he kept busy at it. He **disputed against the Grecians**—foreign Jews or proselytes brought in from outside. Paul preached boldly in spite of danger. His strong preaching of Jesus as the Son of God angered them. They, like the Damascus Jews, **went about to slay him**. The **brethren**—men of the church—found out the plan. They were more concerned than Paul for himself. **They brought him . . . to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus**, his home.

Rest for a Season

Acts 9:31 Then had the churches—local congregations—**rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria**—all of Palestine west of the Jordan River. With the chief contender out of the country, the Jew's anger cooled somewhat, and they ceased for a time to harass the church. The church could now give unhindered attention to prayer, worship, study, teaching, and service. Therefore, they **were edified**. They walked **in the fear of the Lord**—carefully obeying—**and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost**—the inner blessings the Holy Spirit bestowed. They **were multiplied**—souls were saved and added to the church. It was a time of spiritual prosperity. Their greatest strength was in the fact of the Spirit's presence in each one. They walked with sins forgiven **in the comfort of the Holy Ghost**. A Spirit-filled church bears spiritual fruit and wins souls.

Gospel preaching is not to be silenced because of opposition or the noisy clamor of the world. Persecution and peace can each be used of God to bless the church. We should watch for opportunities to help, encourage, and exalt a brother or sister. What can we learn here that will help us individually?

JUST A THOUGHT

As scarce as Truth is, the supply has always exceeded the demand.