

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study guide is to facilitate the study of Acts 9:19b-31 as a supplement to the sermon. It is based on my (Michael's) study and meditation on the passage. This handout can be used for personal study or community group conversation. (I hope you join a group!)

ACTS 9:19b-31 ESV

19b For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus. 20 And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God." 21 And all who heard him were amazed and said, "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?" 22 But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ. 23 When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him, 24 but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night in order to kill him, 25 but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket. 26 And when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. 27 But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. 28 So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. 29 And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists. But they were seeking to kill him. 30 And when the brothers learned this, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus. 31 So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.

STRUCTURE

- I. Saul in Damascus (9:19-25)
 - a. Saul seeks to join the disciples (9:19b)
 - b. Saul is doubted but validated (9:20-22)
 - c. The disciples rescue Saul, and the mission continues (9:23-25)
- II. Saul in Jerusalem (9:26-30)
 - a. Saul seeks to join the disciples (9:26a)
 - b. Saul is doubted but validated (9:26-29)
 - c. The disciples rescue Saul, and the mission continues (9:29b-30)
- III. Summary statement: God restores Israel through Christ, by the Spirit (9:31)

GENERAL COMMENTARY:

This section emphasizes the importance of the body of Christ, which Saul formerly persecuted. Saul will come to rely upon the church to nurture his faith, strengthen his gift, provide a mission base, advocate for him, and even save his life. The church Saul formerly wanted to destroy now builds him up. This section encourages the faithful to prioritize life together.

Luke presents us with two parallel sections: the first, of Saul in Damascus (9:19-25), and the second, of Saul in Jerusalem (9:26-30). Given that Saul met Jesus on the road to Damascus to bring Christians back to Jerusalem, this scene brings us full circle. Saul departed, a missionary of death, and he returned a missionary of life.

These two sections run parallel in the way they both present Saul's first priority of joining with the disciples and of his (very close) second priority of proclaiming the good news. Saul's friends provide a supportive mission base for him to launch out. To sustain our mission, we all need community. Without these anonymous disciples, Saul would have remained anonymous to us.

The section closes in verse 31 by summarizing the broader narrative. In the absence of chapter divisions, Luke (and ancient authors) commonly employed summary statements like this one. Acts contains summary statements at each division and can thus be divided like this:

- Book 1: The birth of the church in Jerusalem (1:1-2:47)
- Book 2: Expansion of the Jerusalem church (3:1-6:7)
- Book 3: Roads out from Jerusalem (6:8-9:31)

- Book 4: Peter's mission to the Gentiles (9:32-12:24)
- Book 5: Paul's mission to Asia Minor (12:25-16:5)
- Book 6: Paul's mission extended to the Aegean (16:6-19:20)
- Book 7: The extension of the church to Rome (19:21-28:31)

The summary statement 9:31 shows how the gospel has extended to Judea, Samaria, and Galilee (we did not previously know of church activity in Galilee), which comprise all Israel together. Luke's message is that God has restored the remnant of Israel. The gospel has traveled from Jerusalem along Roman roads, fulfilling ancient prophecies about Israelite restoration by the Messiah and the Spirit. Luke emphasizes both when he couches the church's growth in terms of "walking in the fear of the Lord (Jesus) and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit." The church that fled Saul's persecution now enjoyed a time of "peace," for Saul was no longer a threat to God's kingdom. Instead, he endangered the kingdom of darkness.

VERSE-BY-VERSE COMMENTARY:

19b For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus.

—"For some days": this can be understood as "some days" (ESV, NKJV), "several days" (NASB, NIV), or "some time" (CSB). It was neither a permanent stay nor a minor pit stop. He spent a little bit of time there.

—Galatians fills us in a little on the timeframes:

- [Gal 1:17-18 ESV] *"nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days."*
- Stott: "It is an intentionally vague time reference, but we know from Galatians 1:17-18 that these 'many days' actually lasted three years, and that during this period Saul was in Arabia. He need not have travelled far, because at that time the north-west tip of Arabia reached nearly to Damascus. But why did he go to Arabia? Some think he went on a preaching mission, but others suggest more persuasively that he needed time to be quiet, and that Jesus now revealed to him those distinctive truths of Jewish-Gentile solidarity in the body of Christ which he would later call 'the mystery made known to me by revelation', 'my gospel' and 'the gospel... I received... by revelation from Jesus Christ'. Some have even wondered whether those three years in Arabia were a deliberate compensation for the three years with Jesus which the other apostles had had but Saul had not."
- Some scholars suggest that Saul maintained Damascus as a home base, from which he launched out into Arabia for evangelistic missions. These missions provoked King Aretas of Arabia (2 Cor. 11:32-33) to pursue Saul into Damascus, from which he escaped in a basket through the wall. After three years spent mostly in Arabia, but basing out of Damascus, Saul sets off for Jerusalem.

—"he was with the disciples at Damascus":

- God's wisdom in appointing Ananias to pray over Saul stands out. Ananias no doubt vouched for Saul to the church in Damascus. Otherwise, they would have responded in fear, like those in Jerusalem (9:26).
- The most important next step for a new believer is to connect with other disciples of Jesus. Spiritual disciplines, Christian ethics, and everything else that comprises the Christian life grow insofar as we walk in community. We all become like the folks we spend the most time with. Proverbs 13:20: *"He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm."*
- We should all ask ourselves, "Who am I with the most?" Are we commonly with disciples of Jesus? If so—and only if so—we will look more like Jesus.

20 And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God." 21 And all who heard him were amazed and said, "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?"

—The previous verse about spending time with the disciples of Damascus provided a "header" for this section. Saul spent lots of time with the church of Damascus, but this did not preclude his evangelistic endeavors. Church should not become a holy fortress that shelters us from outside interface. Rather, church is a mission base on the frontier of a lost and depraved world. Gatherings of Christians nurture us so we can witness effectively, not so we can sequester our light from a dark world.

—"immediately he proclaimed":

- Saul will one day warn Timothy that an elder *"must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil"* (1 Tm. 3:6). This warning highlights the difference between evangelistic proclamation and holding a position of leadership in God's church. Leaders in God's church must be seasoned. Elders are to be fathers to the flock; the very word, "elder" implies such. Evangelists are different, however. Recent converts like Saul can

"immediately" begin proclaiming Christ—and must! New converts are often the best at winning new converts.

- Saul is "filled with the Holy Spirit" in 9:17-18, and he proclaims Christ "immediately" afterwards in 9:20. We commonly observe this relationship. For instance, 4:31 reads, "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly." The filling of the Spirit is a turbo-booster for evangelistic proclamation. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is bold preaching.
- "proclaimed Jesus":
 - This word for "proclaimed" is often translated "preached" and bears different connotations than "taught" or "instructed." Most instances of its use in the New Testament occur in outdoor settings, where it is associated with the glad tidings of the gospel. The image in our mind should be less of a seated rabbi or Ted Talk orator, and rather of a street-preaching herald.
 - However, this gospel herald is not like the awkward doom-and-gloom sign-holders at baseball games who "herald" the need to turn or burn, but rather like the messenger sent forth from the battlefield who sprints home to report the "good news" of victory in battle. It is from this latter image, in fact, that we derive the word "gospel." It is a political word, announcing the good news of victory, of spoils, and of perpetuity. To be a herald of the gospel looks like that messenger, sprinting on the fuel of conquest. As evangelists, then, we are called to more than the conveyance of information; we are called to herald the glad tidings of Jesus Christ and to publish it abroad with the smile of victory.

—"in the synagogues":

- God told Ananias that Saul would be God's "chosen instrument of mine to carry My name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel" (9:15). That prophecy is being fulfilled here, as Saul proclaims Christ to the Jews.
- It makes sense that Saul would preach in the synagogues, given that he would have been a highly respected rabbi. In Acts 13:15, Saul's sheer presence in a synagogue awards him an invitation to preach. God delights to use our pre-established "street cred" to grant access for gospel proclamation. If we influence people in business or politics or Hollywood or social media—not to mention our family—God will use our position and influence to open doors.

—"saying, 'He is the Son of God'":

- The participle "saying" qualifies Saul's proclamation of Jesus. Saul proclaims Jesus by announcing that He is the Son of God.
- In a Jewish context such as the synagogue, "Son of God" meant that Jesus was the Christ—the anointed king of Israel. We have record of this language in God's promise to David that one of his sons would rule eternally and that his son would also be a son of God (2 Sam. 7). Picking up on this theme, David says in Psalm 2 that the king of Israel is a son of God upon coronation. Since it is a Messianic Psalm, it prophesies about the coming Christ who will be the Son of God in a unique way. When Saul says Jesus is THE Son of God, the Jews understand him to proclaim Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah, the eternal King of Israel.

—"and all who heard him were amazed": they are not "amazed" because Saul persuades them. The rest of the verse ("is not this the man who...?") indicates they are amazed that the one who so opposed Christ now promotes Him. In addition, the next verse speaks of Saul "confounding"—rather than convincing—the Jews.

22 But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.

—"But Saul increased all the more in strength":

- "But": despite the disbelief of verse 21, Saul prevailed.
- John the Baptist also increased in strength. Lk. 1:80: *"And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel."*
- Jesus also increased in strength.
 - Lk. 1:40: *"And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him."*
 - Lk. 2:52: *"And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man."*
- Saul is in good company!
- Saul's growth in gifting reveals a growth in favor with God as he faithfully proclaims Christ. Our giftedness should grow, and it grows by use. Saul will later exhort Timothy to *"fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands"* (2 Tm. 1:6). Spiritual gifts can be imparted from others, but we have the responsibility to nurture their growth. Just as a tiny

“flame”—a spark, even—can transform into a mighty bonfire, so giftedness grows through diligent stewardship, but the flame diminishes if neglected.

—“and confounded the Jews”: just like the Jews *“could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit”* by which Stephen preached (6:10), the murderer of Stephen—the one saved by Stephen’s prayer (7:60)—now preaches like Stephen (9:22). None can withstand the wisdom of the Spirit on Saul, who is filled with the Holy Spirit (9:17-18). O, how we need the Spirit of God to fill us with strength and wisdom!

—“by proving that Jesus was the Christ”:

- We know from other synagogue visits, that Saul proved the identity of Jesus by showing how Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament.
- There is a place for “proving” the identity of Jesus and not just assuming our audience agrees with us. This word and its context assume the presence of debate. Christians must be prepared to debate our faith claims in the same way Saul does throughout Acts: reasoning from God’s revelation in Scripture (13:13-41), in nature (14:17), and in personal testimony (22:1-21; 26:1-23). We must also be prepared to build bridges through cultural observation (17:23, 28) and displays of supernatural power (1:8).
- In the previous verse, Saul proclaimed Jesus as the *Son of God*; here Luke emphasizes his proof that Jesus is the *Christ*. These terms would have run parallel in the Jewish mind. I am reminded of how Luke refers to “the Holy Spirit” and “the Spirit of Jesus” in Acts 16:6 and 7, respectively. It seems that Luke aims to teach us by employing diverse terminology. In Acts 9, he wants us to know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God (cf. Mt. 16:16).
- This has me thinking about the degree to which we should be knowledgeable of Scripture to evangelize well. Granted, the testimony of a recent convert can win a whole city (Jn. 4), but the examples in Acts repeatedly portray evangelism in terms that require knowledge of the Bible. This is especially true when the apostles preach to Jews, but even when they preach to Gentiles, they refer to Old Testament Bible stories. For instance, in Acts 14 and 17, Saul preaches to Gentiles by referencing the creation story.
- I think it is important as believers to learn to articulate the good news of Jesus in a way that incorporates the Old Testament since this is the primary method of evangelism in the New Testament. In the least, we can reference the creation story and fall of man. Ideally, we are also capable of explaining how Jesus fulfills the promises made about Him. Saul, writing to a Gentile church, explains the gospel like this: “Christ died for our sins, *according to the Scriptures*... He was buried and raised, on the third day, *according to the Scriptures*” (1 Cor. 15:3-4).
- I don’t buy the assertion that unbelieving Gentiles don’t need the Bible because they have no grid for it. Faith comes by hearing, not the word of man, but the word of God (Rom. 10:17; cf. 1 Pet. 1:23-25). There is a place for philosophical arguments (the cosmological argument, teleological argument, moral argument, etc.), but these offer no substitute for God’s holy word, which alone conceives faith.
- Here is one way of sharing the gospel that involves the Old Testament. I admit that this example would only apply in some contexts and that you might have to simplify it, depending on the setting. But I have shared something like this with unbelieving friends when issues of faith have arisen: *“I believe that the world did not create itself but is rather created. Our common sense tells us this, but so does the Scripture. God made a perfect world, without any death or tears or pain. That is God’s heart—a world without suffering. Unfortunately, mankind introduced suffering through sin. We rebelled against God, and the world has been out of order ever since. The good news is that God did not give up on the world. He began with one person—Abraham—promising him that the whole world would one day be blessed through him and his descendants (Israel). The promise seemed impossible because Israel continued in mankind’s original rebellion. But God’s promise is not limited by man’s rebellion. One of Abraham’s descendants, Jesus—who came to be known as the Messiah (King of Israel)—lived a perfect life in submission to the Father. He launched a revival in Israel, but the powers-that-be viewed Him as a threat, and they crucified Him. Even this fulfilled the Scriptures, however. Various prophets (David, Isaiah, Zechariah) predicted that the Messiah would be pierced to death. David and Isaiah also predicted, however, that He would rise from the dead—and that actually happened. Jesus’ resurrection was the beginning of redemption for the whole world—a reversal of the death and suffering our sin introduced. Jesus paid for our sins on the cross, rose above them in the resurrection, and one day He will return and restore this world to what it was before sin entered: a perfect world without any death or tears or pain. Jesus wants you to be part of that world, but you must confess your contribution to the fallenness of this one. In other words, you must confess your sin and place your faith in Jesus as the risen Messiah and Lord.”*

- I know that's a lot, and it is probably a little intimidating to try to remember. My point is not that you need to memorize this format but that we should all seek to articulate the gospel from Scripture. Bridgeway offers evangelistic training, and if you are interested contact susan.washa@bridgewaychurch.com or scott.washa@bridgewaychurch.com.

23 When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him, 24 but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night in order to kill him, 25 but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket.

—"When many days had passed":

- Saul spent "some days" with the disciples in Damascus, but after "many days" the Jews wanted him dead. The original bewilderment (9:21) boiled slowly into violent rage. Persecution is often this way.
- In America, we can worship freely without fear of persecution. However, Christians were blamed for the overturning of Roe v. Wade, and Christian ministries were vandalized. As the war over sexuality heats up, Christians are routinely called hateful bigots, even when they express their views gently. It is not hard to imagine a boiling point like what Saul experienced, especially if there is a trigger event. We should not fear persecution, but we should pray that our government maintains freedom of worship (1 Tim. 2:1-4).

—"his disciples":

- No sooner than Saul becomes a disciple than he becomes a disciple-maker. This is the way! We can't all preach to multitudes, but we can all make disciples.
- They probably became his disciples because of his preaching. Saul was a new believer, but these were likely even newer. If we think we are not mature enough to make disciples, there is always someone with less understanding whom we can take by the hand.
- Saul relied on Ananias for sight, baptism, and the filling of the Spirit; he relied on the church to nurture his nascent faith; he relied on his disciples to rescue him. The self-sufficient Pharisee now relies on the church, even as he relies on Jesus.
- None of us is self-sufficient. God built us for an interdependent community where we depend on others and others depend on us. Saul's disciples once relied on him; now he relies on them.

—"let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket":

- This story is told in 2 Corinthians 11:32-33, where Paul catalogues his persecutions, culminating in this one: *"At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me, but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands."*
- The story reminds us of the spies whom Rahab sheltered and released through a window in the wall: *"Then she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house was built into the city wall, so that she lived in the wall"* (Jos. 2:15).
- Schreiner also mentions David, who escapes through a window, and comments, "These OT figures are deliverers for Israel, and Luke therefore indicates that while Jews saw Saul as their enemy, he was actually God's chosen liberator."

26 And when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. 27 But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus.

—"And when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples":

- On the road from Jerusalem to Damascus, Jesus interrupted Saul's journey, and now it comes full circle. Jesus leads Saul back to Jerusalem, not with Christian hostages, but with the gospel of Christ.
- This should be our first move upon entering any city—attempt to join some disciples! Many Christians live in a city for years without really trying to "join" any group of Christ-followers.
- For Saul to "join" them implies they had a "togetherness" about them. If they only occasionally gathered, there would have been no group to join.
- Stott: "First in Damascus, then in Jerusalem, he sought out 'the disciples' (19, 26)... True conversion always issues in church membership."

—"And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple":

- First, Ananias feared meeting with Saul (9:13-14); now the Jews of Jerusalem fear the same.
- They "did not believe that he was a disciple," which means they believed he was faking it to arrest more Christians.

- No one in this story is censured for doubting the genuineness of Saul's conversion. There is an appropriate form of fear, which saves us from danger. These disciples are walking in discernment.

—"But Barnabas..."

- We first met Barnabas in 4:36-37, when he sold a field and laid it at the apostles' feet, displaying lavish generosity and trust in the apostles.
- Barnabas' real name was Joseph. The nickname, Barnabas, means "son of encouragement (4:36). Here in 9:27, he lives up to his name by believing in Saul and advocating for him to the apostles.
- Here is another reason we need community: we need advocates. We need people who believe in us when no one else does. We need people who can look past our past when others struggle to. We all need sons and daughters of encouragement in our lives.
- Barnabas' faith in Saul carries into Acts 11, where he recruits the former persecutor to join him in spreading the gospel to the Hellenists. Had it not been for Barnabas, we would have never heard of Saul. Barnabas advocated for Saul in Jerusalem and recruited him for ministry in Antioch, which became the missions base that made Saul famous and resulted in numerous New Testament books.

—"declared... how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly..."

- Barnabas told them three things: (1) Saul saw Jesus, (2) Saul heard Jesus, (3) Saul proclaimed Jesus—at great risk.
- Saul/Paul defends his apostleship to the Corinthians by saying, "Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" (1 Cor. 9:1). Some argue from this text that an appearance of the Lord Jesus is required for apostles. This was perhaps true for the original apostles (plus Paul), who held unique authority in the church, but it is likely untrue for the "apostles" (ESV: "messengers") of 2 Cor. 8:23 or of the "apostles" Jesus grants throughout the church age (Eph. 4:11), which can be better understood as missionaries sent by the church. Sometimes I (and others) like to make the distinction between capital-A Apostles and lowercase-a apostles. The former held unique first-century authority; the latter were a less authoritative designation for ambassadors/messengers/missionaries sent from the church.

28 So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. 29 And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists. But they were seeking to kill him. 30 And when the brothers learned this, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

—"So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem":

- The "So" indicates that their acceptance of Saul hinged on Barnabas' testimony.
- Just like we saw in Damascus, Saul gathered with believers and evangelized non-believers. Everywhere Saul went, he felt the need for community AND evangelism. Not one or the other, but both.

—"preaching boldly in the name of the Lord": The boldness suggests danger. The next verse elaborates on the form of danger.

—"spoke and disputed against the Hellenists":

- The Hellenists are mentioned in 6:1, 9:29, and 11:20. These are Greek-speaking Jews. In Acts 6, the Hellenists were a disenfranchised minority, and it is from their company that Stephen arose.
- Stephen disputed with his Hellenist brothers and paid for it with blood. Ironically, the one responsible for Stephen's blood now risks spilling his own blood to dispute with Hellenists in Jerusalem—perhaps the same ones Stephen formerly testified to. It's like a song playing on repeat. The reader expects catastrophic results.
- "disputed": this word is used only one other time in Acts. On the other occasion, it was Stephen's enemies, the Hellenists, who "disputed" or "argued" with him. This time Saul goes on offense. It's like he's asking to die. He is a missionary kamikaze.

—"and when the brothers learned this":

- The church realizes the danger Saul has placed himself in, and they shuttle him off to safety.
- We all need siblings in Christ who see the danger we don't... who watch our back as we rush ahead. The church that once enlightened Saul's eyes (9:18), nurtured Saul's faith (9:19), saved Saul's life (9:25), and championed Saul's sincerity (9:27), now, again, saves Saul's life by seeing the danger he seems blind to (9:30).
- O, how desperately we need the church of Jesus! We have made Saul into a superhero, but he was nothing without the church. Neither are any of us. Vibrant faith requires a supportive church, and a supportive church requires people of vibrant faith. We need the church, and people in the church

need us. "Heroes" and "leaders" will assume front-seat roles because God moves the ball forward with leaders. However, leaders move forward by the support of their church.

—"Caesarea... Tarsus": Caesarea provided the nearest coastline, from which Saul could sail to Tarsus, his hometown. He will remain there until Barnabas comes looking for him (11:25-26).

31 So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.

—This is a summary statement that operates almost like a chapter break. The gospel expanded throughout Jerusalem and surrounding regions in Acts 2-7, it expanded into Samaria in Acts 8. There is no mention of Galilee until now, but Luke wants to ensure we know the church is expanding throughout all Israel. In fulfillment of God's promise in Ezekiel 37, God is restoring Israel by pouring out His Spirit.

—After this chapter break, the story will trace the flow of the gospel into Gentile territories and people groups (albeit, with a brief transitional story about Peter).

—"had peace": the persecution of Acts 8:1-4 subsided and the church was "built up" as a result. We often hear that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church"—meaning that the more you kill the saints, the more the gospel spreads. This has happened at times, such as in Acts 8-9. However, at other times, persecution has squelched gospel expansion. For instance, Constantinople once held the largest church in the world and was the capital of Christendom. Now that church is a mosque and almost everyone there is Muslim, thanks to persecution. God can bless despite persecution, and even through persecution, but Christians must pray for peace so that the gospel can flourish openly (1 Tm. 2:1-4).

—"had peace... was being built up": with Saul no longer persecuting, the church had peace; by Saul's and Philip's proclamation, the church was built up. The passive verb tense "was being built up" suggests the hand of the Lord Jesus, actively building His church as He snatches enemies up, turning them into apostles. It reminds us of Paul's later writings where, for instance, he tells the Ephesians that they "are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit" (Eph. 2:22). In other words, the ascended Lord Jesus is constructing His temple, expanding it throughout Israel (here) and to the ends of the earth (especially after Acts 9).

—"walking": we are reminded of Christianity as "the Way" (9:2). Jesus met the eunuch on his "way" (8:26), and He met Saul on his "way" (9:3). Now the entire church throughout Israel is walking in "the Way" of Jesus. This means that they are walking obediently in His footsteps and following the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

—"fear of the Lord... comfort of the Holy Spirit":

- People tend to emphasize one or the other. On the one hand, they emphasize the need to fear God, for He is a consuming fire, and it is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Amen to that! But the picture is incomplete. On the other hand, people emphasize the comfort of the Holy Spirit, who seals us until the day of redemption and gives us gifts and speaks to our hearts exactly what we need to hear. Amen to that! But the picture is incomplete. We need the fear of the Lord AND the comfort of the Holy Spirit. Not just one or the other.
- A healthy church fears the Lord Jesus by trembling in His presence and obeying His commands. Saul exhibited his fear of the Lord by boldly proclaiming Christ rather than fearing man. The church likewise exhibits the fear of Christ by forgiving Saul for persecuting them and supporting Saul in his own persecution.
- A healthy church enjoys the comfort of the Holy Spirit. Saul enjoys the comfort of the Spirit when Ananias, Barnabas, and the churches of Damascus and Jerusalem aid him and advocate for him. The churches likewise enjoy the comfort of the Spirit as they are "built up" (9:31) through support of one another.
- The experience of the healthy church should be one of both fear and comfort.
- The fear of the Lord addresses our orientation toward God, and the comfort of the Spirit emphasizes His ministry toward us. These pair together. When our spirit trembles before the glory of Jesus, the Spirit comforts and strengthens us.

—"it multiplied":

- The multiplication of the church issued out from the church walking in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

The multiplication did not occur because they purchased the right sound equipment, timed their parts right in the Sunday liturgy, or created the right website. It's not wrong for churches to think about those things, but if we are not relating properly to God, we have the cart before the horse. Even if we multiply, in such a scenario, we will have multiplied dry religion. True multiplication issues from deep connection to God, which manifests emotively in fear (fear of the Lord) and comfort (comfort of the Holy Spirit).