

Dr. Craig Keener, Acts, Lecture 12, Acts 9

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This is Dr. Craig Keener in his teaching on the book of Acts. This is session 12 on Acts 9.

Well, Saul has been arresting people, but now Saul gets arrested by the Lord himself. Do you ever think that God couldn't use you or God couldn't use you very much? Well, if God can use Saul, God can use any of us.

In fact, that application is even made in 1 Timothy chapter 1. God here shows his sovereign power. The persecutor becomes an agent of grace. And we read that sometimes like in the Maccabean literature where God intercepts a persecutor, but here God actually makes him a vessel for his own purposes.

Saul initiates this level of persecution. That's why you have peace in 9:31 after his conversion and after the apostles make sure that he gets out of town. But Saul is the one initiating this level of persecution.

He goes to get letters of recommendation from the high priest. Letters of recommendation were a very common epistolary form back then because if you wanted to get ahead, you needed somebody to help you. And so, you'd go to somebody of higher social station and they would write a letter of recommendation to one of their peers or sometimes to somebody who was subordinate.

And Cicero was a master of this. In fact, book 13 of one of the collections of his letters is just letters of recommendation. And you have a lot of other letters of recommendation from antiquity as well.

But somehow Cicero was such a master of this, he learned how to write different letters of recommendation for different people. Once in a while he said to more than one person, this guy's the best. I can't recommend anybody like him.

As Paul says of Timothy in Philippians chapter two, Cicero said that for a little bit more than one person, but he usually reserved that for just a few. But other times he'd say, show me your loyalty to me. You are my friend and so I know you'll do even more than what I ask.

The kind of letters of recommendation we have in the New Testament, Philemon, or calling up a debt. Reciprocity was a big social issue back then. So, you owe me a favor.

Well, this is a time for me to capitalize on that. They wouldn't usually put it that way. Or I owe you a favor if you do this for me.

I'm in your debt. Whatever this costs you, I'll repay it. Things like that that we have in letters of recommendation in the New Testament.

Some of our letters in the New Testament have partial, part of it is a letter of recommendation. Phoebe is recommended, Romans 16, 1 and 2, and so forth. Well, anyway, Saul wants letters of recommendation from the high priest.

That would be very compelling. It would suggest that the high priest supports his mission. We talked earlier about how he could have gotten access to the high priest.

Well, the high priest at this point would have been Caiaphas. A young man ordinarily would have more trouble getting access to the high priest. But remember Galatians 1.14, Saul is advancing among his peers.

22.3, that he's a student of Gamaliel suggests he's from a wealthy family. So, the fact that he was a Hellenist wouldn't really count against him much. I mean, the chief priests, you look at the tomb inscriptions, the tomb inscriptions are often in Greek.

They valued the wider Greek culture of the Eastern Mediterranean world. The high priest was respected by Jewish communities outside of Judea and Galilee, outside of Palestine. The high priest no longer necessarily had authority for extradition as in the Maccabean period.

He wasn't ruling everything by himself, but the high priest was respected and diaspora synagogues would likely be happy to cooperate with him if they could. Also in chapter nine in verse two, we read about the way. Interestingly, Saul is actually traveling on a way, on the way to Damascus.

It's said in one of the passages, uses the same Greek word *hodos*, he *hodos*. But the phrase, the way, of course, Jewish wisdom spoke of the way of truth and the way of righteousness as opposed to way of folly and so on. The Essenes claimed that they preached the divine path, the right way in which you should go.

And of course, John the Baptist came proclaiming the way of the Lord, make the path straight for the new exodus. So, it's not surprising that the movement was called the way. In the United States, we can't really call our churches that because a cult appropriated that name instead.

But in any case, that was a chosen name that the early Christian movement used for itself. The Essenes would have appreciated using that for themselves too. He's on his way to Damascus.

Now that's a long journey. That's 135 miles or 220 kilometers north of Jerusalem. That would take probably six days on foot for the average traveler in this period.

There were a number of Essenes in Damascus unless that's meant symbolically in the Damascus document, which may be, there's a bit of debate on that. But in any case, it speaks of synagogues in Damascus. Most of these would not have been Essenes, but there were synagogues in Damascus.

Obviously, it's synagogues plural. You couldn't fit all these in one synagogue by any means known to us useful in ancient architecture. According to Josephus, there were over 20,000 Jewish people living there.

So, you needed multiple synagogues. In fact, Josephus tells us that there were as many as 18,000 Jews massacred there in the year 66. So, they had a sizable Jewish community.

Did Paul go on foot or not? Well, that's a question. If he went on horseback, it wouldn't have taken a full six days. It would have been a lot quicker.

But in chapter nine and verse three, Saul and his companions are astonished by a light from heaven. And we've already read about God revealing himself at Mount Sinai. Stephen talks about that in Acts chapter seven.

Well, this light from heaven would be understood as the Shekinah, God's presence, God's glory. And this happens various times in theophanies, including the theophany that accompanies a divine calling. It happens in Exodus chapter three, at the burning bush.

It happens in Isaiah chapter six, where Isaiah sees the glory of the Lord. It happens in Ezekiel chapter one. Each of these passages has a divine calling.

It's not reported in every case. It's not reported in Jeremiah's case, not exactly in Gideon's case. Although in Gideon's case and in Manoah's case, in Judges six and Judges 13, the angel does do some interesting, amazing, glorious things.

But anyway, in chapter nine and verse three, this is associated with a theophany. Actually, Luke would expect even an audience that didn't know the Old Testament, although he expects his audience to pretty much know the Old Testament, but even an audience that didn't know the Old Testament would recognize what this is because at Jesus' birth, the glory of the Lord shines around the shepherds when the annunciation to them is made of Jesus' birth. And at this point, Saul should know and his companions should know this is the Lord.

This is God. But Saul is going to have a hard time swallowing that. So, chapter nine and verse four, he falls to the ground.

Well, that was common at divine or angelic revelations, both in the Old Testament and in Jewish literature. You find it in Daniel a number of times with angels. He falls to the ground.

Saul, Saul, his name is doubled. Why is that? Genesis 22:11, Abraham, Abraham is an angel of the Lord as the angel of the Lord calls to him. And in chapter 46 and verse two of Genesis, Jacob, Jacob, as the Lord speaks to him in a night vision.

Exodus chapter three and verse four, Moses, Moses at his calling. First Samuel chapter three and verse 10, Samuel, Samuel. So sometimes when God would speak and have something very important to say, the name would be doubled.

And some of these cases were very nice cases. So, Saul may be expecting something nice, even though he fell off, well, either fell off his horse or fell off his feet. But Jesus doesn't say anything nice.

Exactly. He says, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? Saul, how can he be persecuting the Lord? How can he be persecuting God? But remember what Jesus said back in Luke's first volume, Luke chapter 10 and verse 16. If they reject you, they reject me.

They receive you, they receive me. Saul has been persecuting Jesus' followers. He's therefore persecuting Jesus.

What they do to us as we proclaim the Lord's name, they do to the Lord. In fact, Paul says something like this later himself, when the Corinthians, some of them, are being moved toward his rivals who are preaching a false gospel. And Paul says, you know, as ambassadors for Christ, we beseech you be reconciled to God.

And in the context, basically, he's saying, you need to be reconciled to us to be reconciled to God, because we're God's agents to you. Well, that can be very easily abused. People have abused that a lot.

And we want to be careful never to do that. But having said that, you know, as we speak for Christ, as we're letting people know about Christ, we act as his agents, as his representatives. Well, Saul's confused now.

He doesn't want to admit the obvious. Who are you, Lord? It's an obvious theophany, but how can Paul be persecuting God? And so, you know, Lord Kuria, it's a respectful title, but used in the vocative, used as a direct address, curia in the director addresses Curia. It can mean sir, but it also can mean something stronger.

It can mean Lord. It can mean the divine Lord. So, you know, is this God? Is this an angel? What is going on here? And Jesus answers in chapter six, well, Jesus answers, I'm Jesus whom you are persecuting.

But in verse six, he says, go into Damascus and you'll get more instructions there. It will tell you what you must do. And in Greek, this language of what you must do actually echoes what we also have in 237 where the crowds say, what must we do in order to be saved? And Peter says, repent.

Or in chapter 16 in verse 30, what must I do to be saved? The Philippian jailer asks. Well, Paul is about to find out what he must do. What he must do to acknowledge Jesus as Lord is to embrace the mission that God has for him.

In verse eight, he finds out that he's been blinded. Now God had sometimes blinded people to prevent an evil purpose. Remember in Genesis chapter 19 and verse 11, the men of Sodom are blinded.

Second Kings chapter six, a whole army is struck blind and Elisha leads them somewhere else. At least they're blinded in terms of what their surroundings really are. And Elisha leads them to a place where they're captured and then the purposes are benevolent for them in the long run.

But this is probably also similar to Zechariah being struck mute in Luke chapter one. Except Zechariah was an imperfect, but good character. And Saul at this point has been a bad character.

Thinking he was doing God's will, but he was clearly wrong. He fasts for three days according to verse nine. Three days was not uncommon for a fast, but without water, it would cause dehydration, especially in a very dry area of the world.

In Judaism, it was often coupled with mourning or repentance. By the way, you normally don't want to do a three-day fast without water. It's actually dangerous for your kidneys to do long fasts without water.

Although God did a miracle for Moses and so on. But in any case, there were people who did this and Saul does this in this case. I mean, this is life and death.

He can't believe it, but he has to believe that he's been on the wrong side. He thought he was serving God. He thought he was serving the Torah.

And he finds out that basically everything he believes needs to be rethought. So in Judaism, fasting was often used for mourning or repentance. He really has reason for repentance.

Usually in the New Testament, it's conjoined with prayer and that's what he's doing. And we find out later he's also had a vision. We find that out not because Luke has to narrate it.

He just tells us; he just informs us of that by recounting that Ananias was told by Jesus that Saul had had one. Chapter nine, verses 10 through 19. We read about Ananias' mission.

Well, Jesus calls to Ananias and Ananias answers very respectfully, very obediently. Here I am, you know, on the Old Testament, Hineni. 1 Samuel chapter three, verse 10, you know, the Lord is calling to Samuel and Eli, the priest says, well, okay, finally, Eli figures this out.

This is the Lord calling the boy and he says, next time you say, Lord speak, your servant listens. So, he goes and lays down and the Lord calls him again a third time. And Samuel says, here I am.

Or Isaiah at his calling. Here I am. Here am I. Ananias is going to be so obedient.

He's so happy that Jesus is appearing to him. And then he gets his instructions. You're supposed to go to Saul of Tarsus.

Oh, wait a minute. I've heard of this Saul. Now this Saul is, you know, Jesus appears to Saul, and Saul at first is like, who are you? Now he appears to Ananias and Ananias says, I don't know if this is a good idea.

I've heard that he's come here to persecute us. Well, that's none of his business. If the Lord gives you instructions, even if it's going to send you into trouble, you need to do it.

But the Lord says he's a chosen vessel for my honor. And this is something that's going to be repeated three times in the book of Acts. In one place, Paul can narrate it in a briefer way and leave out Ananias' involvement, but it behooves him certainly to mention Ananias, a man devout according to the law when he's speaking to the Jerusalemite crowds in Acts chapter 22.

The Lord speaks his call directly to Saul and that's narrated in some places. In some places it's narrated that he speaks the call to Saul through Ananias. Saul gets it from more than one direction.

I mean, the Lord clearly wants him and the Lord confirms it in multiple ways. So anyway, Ananias is obedient. Now he says that Jesus says that Saul is staying with Judas on Straight Street.

Jewish culture emphasized hospitality very much. It was emphasized throughout the Mediterranean world. There've been a number of studies in this, Koenig and Artebery and others.

Very heavy emphasis on hospitality, Jewish hospitality, even more so. So, if a traveling Jew came to your area and you were Jewish, you would probably take them in, especially if they had letters of recommendation. And if they had letters of recommendation from the high priest, you certainly would want to take them in.

So, we don't know whether Judas was a believer. More likely he's not a believer at this point, at least not before Saul got to him. Straight Street, probably, well, many scholars think it's the long East West Street running through Damascus.

Damascus was a very ancient city. Some things have been updated according to the Greek way of building things on a grid by this period. But Straight Street may have been the East West Street.

And that would fit the tradition of which street is in view. But the important thing is directions were being given. So, he knew where to find him, just like Cornelius has given some direction as to where to find Peter in the house of Simon the Tanner later on.

Tarsus, Saul of Tarsus. What do we know about Tarsus? Tarsus was a very important city. And not surprisingly, Paul later on says, I'm a citizen of no insignificant city, which was a good way of saying it's a very significant city.

It was. It was the capital of Cilicia. It was prosperous.

Representatives for its merchants were in many other cities in the ancient Mediterranean world. It was also a major university center, especially for philosophy. So depending on what age Paul was when he left there, he was probably pretty young, but depending on what age he left there, he, at least his family, may have had some exposure hearing this in the streets.

There was also a large Jewish community there, which is particularly relevant. So, Ananias is to go and he hears that Saul has also had a vision. Well, paired visions were pretty common.

Actually, paired visions were very uncommon in the ancient world. But when you have anything that was narrated as a paired vision, like maybe in the book of Tobit, it confirms divine coordination. This was not an accident.

And it's also not an accident that we have these two chapters in a row. You have the paired visions with Saul and Ananias both having visions. That can't be a coincidence.

I mean, if one person has it, maybe they're hallucinating. Two people have it independently. That's multiple corroboration.

In Acts chapter 10, Cornelius and Peter have coordinated visions in the same way. So Ananias gives his objections to an absurd command, not unlike Moses, who gave his objections to God's command to go to Egypt and liberate the people. But he sent to Saul verses 15 and 16 that resemble Old Testament call or commissioning narratives.

And then in verse 17, he says, brother Saul, presumably figurative kinship language. They weren't really literally closely related necessarily. You could use that for fellow Jews.

And you find that sometimes in Luke-Acts. You could use it for fellow members of a trade guild or something like that. Here it probably, however, means fellow believer.

And this is remarkable because Ananias belongs to this movement that has been scattered to places like Damascus precisely because Saul of Tarsus is persecuting them. And now he's ready to receive him as a fellow believer. And that's the way the gospel is, that we can love people.

We recognize that all of us have been saved by grace and only by grace. And we could give a lot of accounts of that, of people from either side, people that we had wronged. I remember when I was an atheist, I used to make fun of Christians.

And after my conversion, going back and finding some of those Christians I made fun of and saying, you know, I was so wrong. You were so right. And they were so happy to have me as a brother in the Lord.

So, so gracious. Even though there were reports of this, people who were planning to attack Christians were converted in the night by a vision. And then they had to join the Christians and flee for themselves to the Christians because their own colleagues would have wanted to kill them.

So he says, the Lord sent me to lay hands on you so you might be filled with the spirit and receive your sight. Obviously, he's going to have to be filled with the spirit for his mission of speaking the word of the Lord. And we're going to see very quickly what his mission is starting a couple of verses later.

He's already starting to preach. But verse 18 says the scales fell from his eyes. Well, that recalls the language of the book of Tobit where Tobit was blinded and the scales fell from his eyes when he was healed.

And he was baptized. Well, there were plenty of places where he could have been baptized. One of the places he could have been baptized was the Barada River, which runs through Damascus and was near where the tradition says that Straight Street was.

Chapter 9 verses 19 to 31, where we read about confrontations in Damascus and Jerusalem. And we have parallel responses to Saul in Damascus and Jerusalem. Parallel things are narrated.

He starts preaching, people want to kill him, and the disciples have to send him away because he's just too outspoken about his faith. He doesn't know how to be quiet about it. We need people like that.

But we probably also need people to send them away so that they get martyred prematurely. Both can be valuable. But thank God for people with a zeal for truth.

In any case, the response to Saul in Damascus in his first preaching of Jesus is similar to the response to Jesus' opening message in Luke chapter 4. Now, it says in Acts that all this happened after many days. Luke doesn't really tell us how many days it was. Possibly he didn't know.

It's not like Paul told him everything. Paul wouldn't have given him a blow-by-blow account of every detail. Luke probably didn't write all this down exactly when he was with Paul anyway.

That's my guess. But also, it's just possible that Luke didn't want to get into it. It was aside from his main point.

Luke is going to want to emphasize the Jewish opposition that Paul faced in Damascus, not the specifically Nabatean opposition. We know from Galatians that Paul spent three years in ancient Parthia, at least parts of three years. So, it could have been anywhere from a year and a half to three years.

In Arabia, Nabatean Arabia was the area where the Nabateans lived. That included the Decapolis. It probably didn't include Damascus in this period, although that's a matter of debate because some of the coins are missing.

We don't know exactly who controlled Damascus at this point. But we read in 2 Corinthians 11:32 about the Nabatean Ethnarch, who would have been the head probably of the Nabatean trading community in Damascus. You didn't have to go too far beyond Damascus to be in the territory of the Nabatean Arabs.

Of course, Paul has a reason to emphasize that in Galatians because he's going to go on to talk about Mount Sinai in Arabia in chapter 4. Paul doesn't tell us what he did in Arabia in Galatians chapter 1, but he probably made some people mad. Now when I say Arabia again, this is the area of the Nabatean Arabs. This is Syrian Damascus, not the later Damascus in the Arabian Peninsula, although the Nabatean Arabs were there as well.

But it doesn't say what Saul did, but probably at least part of it was some preaching because he apparently had the Nabatean Ethnarch angry with him, according to 2 Corinthians chapter 11. People could coordinate things. I mean, there were a lot of Jewish people living in Nabatea, a lot of Nabateans living in Perea, which was under Herod Antipas' jurisdiction, the Tetrarch of Galilee.

So, there were a lot of relations between them. It's not surprising they would have teamed up. But Paul mentions especially the Nabatean opposition in 2 Corinthians 11.

Luke is going to focus on the Jewish opposition, which fits his theme of the people who had the most opportunity neglected it the most, and we need to make sure we don't do that today as well. But the idea that they would have worked together is not surprising because even later on, Paul goes to the Jewish community first. Well, that would have made sense to Jewish people in Nabatea that that's where he would have gone first as well.

But in any case, he's back in Damascus. Galatians also talks about him being converted near Damascus and having to escape Damascus, we have in 2 Corinthians 11. So some of this we actually have attested by Paul's own letters about his own experience.

In any case, Paul experiences parallel responses in Damascus and then in Jerusalem, where he says that he started preaching from there. That's where he counts it in Romans 15 because Jerusalem is the key heart of the place from which the gospel is to go forth as in Acts 1:8. So, in 9:22, Saul was already an expert in the scriptures. And look, he had these letters.

So, you can expect that he's going to be welcomed in the synagogues. His expertise in the scriptures, his training in the scriptures, probably tertiary level training. Most people in antiquity, if they had any training at all, it was elementary level.

A fewer number had secondary training. Only the highest level, the people with the most resources got tertiary-level training. He knew the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, backward and forward.

Well, God often uses parts of our backgrounds. He doesn't always, but he often does. Jesus calls in Luke chapter five, Jesus calls disciples as fishers.

Mark chapter one, Matthew chapter four. Disciples who were fishers became fishers of people. And Moses and David were shepherds.

Well, they had a good experience to get them ready to be shepherds of people. So, in this case, God uses the positive aspects of his background. Well, eventually there's a plot that's known to Saul.

That's not too surprising because in antiquity plots usually got leaked. Plots that were hatched within the Roman Senate were leaked. Plots from the Sanhedrin got leaked.

In fact, Josephus, there were a few people working in the Sanhedrin with a plot against Josephus. Josephus says one of his friends heard about it and came and told him about it. So, he was ready.

So word often got out about plots, but people were watching the gates day and night. The gates were closed at night. The gate area could be pretty wide, but the gates were closed at night.

So that would limit those exiting to a very small, very small exits at the gates. So, Saul doesn't dare try to escape that way. The Nabatean ethnarch has people against him.

And according to Luke, the Jewish community there in Damascus, which was pretty sizable, also had people watching the gates. So, this passage in 2 Corinthians 11:32 and 33, mention that he escaped from the wall. Houses were sometimes built into city walls.

The traditional site of Ananias' house actually is in the Nabatean quarter built on the wall. Now that tradition may have arisen from putting together some things here, but it may have also been something of the Christian community there preserved. So, he was let down from the basket in a wall.

Normally windows, even on homes that were on walls, would be very high up so that people couldn't break in or something. Now this would not arouse as much suspicion. There were probably people living outside the city walls.

Most cities grew beyond the walls, but they wouldn't be too shocked to see a basket coming down the wall because people, you know, it was easier than carrying something around. And at night, you know, the windows were closed. Somebody could lower a basket with things in it.

But in any case, where did Saul and his friends get this idea? Well, there's a biblical precedent for it. Joshua 2:15, remember, Rahab let the spies down from her house on the wall. In 1 Samuel 19 and verse 12, David knew that technique as well.

And his wife, Michal, let him down from the wall. Chapter 9, verses 26 and 27. He went to the apostles in Jerusalem.

Initially, everybody was afraid of him, but Barnabas is really... We see God using different personalities in the book of Acts. Barnabas is the kind of person who reaches out to people, the son of encouragement, the apostles called him. Later on, he does that in Antioch.

And still, later, he wants to do that with John Mark. Saul is so zealous for the mission, the mission comes first. We need both Barnabas and Saul.

You know, sometimes we don't get along at certain times like what happened there, but God uses our respective gifts. My wife is probably more of a Barnabas and I'm more of a Paul in some ways, but the Lord uses both of us and we're complementary. In any case, he reached out, he introduced him, took him, and introduced him to the apostles.

Well, Luke is being very concise. Paul's own writings tell us that the only ones he really got to know there among the apostles were Peter and James, the Lord's brother on this occasion. But in any case, the things that are happening to him, he's debating with Hellenist Jews, they're wanting to put him to death.

This is the same thing that happened to Stephen, remember? Saul was also a member of the synagogue and now they want to silence him. So, he appears hidden for martyrdom just like Stephen. This builds suspense in the narrative, especially for the first time here in the book of Acts who undoubtedly had heard of Paul, but might not have heard of Saul.

So, they send him away to Tarsus. Now this fits what Paul says that in his early days, he spent time in the regions of Syria, which would include Damascus and Cilicia, which certainly included Tarsus. So, he sent away to Tarsus.

He probably has relatives there, at least possibly has some relatives there. His family may have moved to Jerusalem or they may have just sent him there, but we know that his nephew lives there later on. But he probably, or at least possibly had some relatives in Tarsus, or at least some people that he would know about that he could be in touch with in Tarsus.

That's where he had been born. And he stayed there for a long time. This may have been one of the places that he describes in 2 Corinthians 11, where he received beatings in the synagogue.

We don't know where he got all those beatings, but we do know from the book of Acts that it was a long time before he was actually sent out from the church in Antioch. He doesn't even get to Antioch yet. It was probably a number of years after his conversion and his calling before he really was able to enter into the heart of his mission.

That doesn't mean he didn't start preaching beforehand, but before he was able to really see the fulfillment of what he'd been called to do or the beginning of the fulfillment of what he'd been called to do. Sometimes today we have people, you know, you're called, you're zealous. I was this way as a young Christian.

I wanted to go straight out and preach. I didn't want to get training. I was reading 40 chapters of the Bible a day, you know, so I was learning the Bible pretty well, although after a while I began to realize, hmm, I need some cultural background.

I'd really like to learn Greek and Hebrew and so on. But initially, I just wanted to go out and preach. I didn't want to get training.

Not all of us have equal access to training. Not all training is equally useful or equally good. But my point is just the call doesn't always mean right now you're going to fulfill everything you're called to do.

The call gives you a direction. It doesn't usually even give you all the details of what you're called to do. I'm still discovering some of the things the Lord spoke to me years ago.

Oh, that's what that means. This makes perfect sense. But in any case, don't be discouraged.

If some of the things the Lord has called you to do, you haven't been able to do yet, and you know you're following what the Lord wants you to do, the Lord often has time when he's getting us ready in different ways for our calling. So, you know where you're headed, you keep headed there, and at the right time, you do it. Until then, keep in mind that's your calling and you're preparing to do it.

So, people who need to spend time in school or whatever to fulfill their calling, it's all right. So, the narrative is going to go back and forth between Paul and Peter, and it's going to stay on Peter for the rest of the chapter and then all of chapter 10. Chapter 9, verse 32, through chapter 9 and verse 43, we read about continuing miracles through Peter.

And Peter follows in the footsteps of Philip, going to the places where Philip has preached. And he ends up in Lydda in verse 32 of chapter 9. Now Lydda was about 25 miles or 40 kilometers northwest of Jerusalem. So, he's not staying in Jerusalem all the time now, even though there are other apostles there.

It was about 11 miles, 17.5 kilometers from Joppa, it appears in verse 36. Joppa and Lydda were the major Jewish coastal cities. Caesarea was an even more major coastal city, but it had more Gentiles, so we wouldn't call it a distinctively Jewish city.

The Jewish residents wanted to call it Jewish. The Jews said, this is our city, and they clashed over that issue. But Joppa and Lydda were Jewish-controlled cities on the coast.

In chapter 9 in verse 35, Sharon is on the coastal plain and Lydda is on the southern end of the coastal plain. Now when all of Lydda and Sharon turned to the Lord after a miracle takes place there, Peter says, Aeneas, Jesus heals you. And this man who's been bedridden is healed.

Aeneas, by the way, of course, it's a name in the Iliad and it was considered the ancestor of the Trojans. Sorry, it was a Trojan who was an ancestor of the Romans. But a lot of Greek and Roman names were used by a lot of diaspora Jews.

So that's not too surprising. But all of Lydda and Sharon, this coastal plain, they turned to the Lord. Now Luke and others sometimes use hyperbole, but the Christian presence was so strong that in the second century, observers noted that there was still a very strong Christian presence in Lydda.

In verse 36, Joppa, Jaffa, is Tel Aviv today. Joppa was a profitable port city. It was about 30 miles, 48 kilometers south of Caesarea.

It was under Jewish control until it came under direct Roman authority in the year six. So, it had a history of Jewish control and there was still a strong Jewish population at this site. Tabitha was there.

She's also called Dorcas. Tabitha is Semitic for gazelle. Dorcas is Greek for gazelle.

So, she's just going by her name in a couple of different languages. I have friends who do that as well. She's also a benefactor or benefactress.

We do know of women patrons in antiquity and inscriptions. Women didn't usually have as much money as men, but sometimes they did and they donated their money to important causes or provided for important causes. About one-tenth of patrons in

antiquity in the inscriptions, at least according to current estimates, were women patrons.

She may have been the benefactor of the widows mentioned in verse 41. She's been providing for them and they're all mourning her. They have a very close relationship.

Well, she's died and the Jewish dead were always washed before burial. That was the custom. Now women could wash either men's corpses or women's corpses.

But for women's corpses, only women could prepare women's bodies for burial. This was partly because of Jewish male teachers' concern for men lusting after women's bodies. In verse 38, they send to Peter and they want him to hurry.

He really does have to hurry because burial was normally done before sunset on the same day. Remember Ananias and Sapphira, buried very quickly. Burial was normally to be before sunset on the same day, so it was very urgent.

There were 11 miles or 17.5 kilometers between Joppa and Lydda. So that could be about four hours of travel each direction at a pretty good pace. So they have to hurry to get to him to bring message to him and he has to basically drop everything and go with them very quickly.

In verse 39, he arrives there. Tabitha is laid in an upper room. Upper rooms were usually small.

The one in Acts chapter one was probably not, but usually, they were small. Often, they were built on flat rooftops. And we have some other sources from antiquity that talk about bodies being prepared there.

In fact, an upper room is also mentioned in some of the other stories about raisings in the Old Testament and also the falling from a higher floor with Eutychus when he gets raised in Acts chapter 20. But well-to-do Roman matrons had maids to take care of some of the things that are mentioned in verse 39, but they were still responsible for seeing to it that it was done. In verse 40, the widows who are mourning, they've been showing Peter its pathos, it's inviting a response from Peter.

In verse 40, Peter goes into the body. The body would have been covered before Peter was brought into the room, but Peter sends the others out, just like in 2 Kings 4.33, where Elisha wants nobody else there for the raising of the Shunammite's son. I have one of the people that we know in Congo, Jean Mabiela, a deacon of the Evangelical Church of Congo, who tells the story of Marie, who was from one of the outlying areas, and Marie was dying of malaria.

She had a fever. It had been so many days since she'd eaten or drunk anything. And so, they brought the body into Dolese, which was the nearest sizable town, trying to get it to the hospital.

But while she was in Dolese, she died. And the taxis were on strike that day. There was no way to get her to the hospital, and they didn't have any money to take her to the hospital in any case.

And so, they heard that there was this prayer meeting going on at Mama Jean's home. So, they brought her to Mama Jean's home and laid her on a prayer mat there. And Mama Jean's assistant, Delphine, said, take this body away.

This is not the place. You can't bring a body here. This is a place of prayer.

And Mama Jean said, no, let's pray. She felt the Lord preparing her for a long time for something really dramatic. And so, they brought the body inside, and she said, okay, everybody who's not part of this prayer group, you go out, following the same model.

And they went out, but they were peeking in the window. And so, she said, what's her name? And the people who were peeking in the window said, Marie. And so, she felt led to call Marie's name as she was praying for her.

And Marie came back to life and was still alive, the last I heard. In any case, so we have this account here where Elisha, it's done similarly to Elisha raising the Shunammite's son, and in some other respects, similar to Elijah raising the widow of Zarephath's son. And speaking of widow's sons, you can also think of the widow of Nahum's son in Luke chapter 7. I actually made a chart in my different accounts.

The parallels aren't there with all of them, but there are enough parallels to see that Luke, where he has access to details that match some of the details in the Old Testament, wants to record them. And of course, in some of these details, Peter and others would have liked to follow them themselves. And Peter had been present when Jesus raised Jairus's daughter.

He'd been present when the widow of Nahum's son was raised. It's not surprising that Quadratus, an early Christian apologist in the early second century, probably is in his old age when he writes this, but he says, into our own time, some of those that Jesus raised from the dead lived on into our own time. So, into a time when he was, Quadratus was alive.

And since Jesus raised some children from the dead, that would make sense. But in any case, he's, Peter sends the others out and then he prays, and in verses 41 and 42, Tabitha arise, and then he presents her alive to the widows, just like in 1 Kings 17,

Elijah presents the child to the widow of Zarephath. And in 2 Kings 4, Elisha presents the child to a Shunammite woman.

And in Luke 7, verse 15, you have it with the widow of Nahum's son. Well, after this, we have a verse that is transitional, but it also makes a very, very, very important point that I think many of Luke's readers, Luke's hearers would have caught. They say hearers because usually one person would read and the others would listen.

They didn't have enough copies for everybody and most people back then couldn't read anyway. So, there was a, he was staying in the house of one Simon the Tanner. Simon again is a common name, one of the most common names of this period.

Simon was a Greek name, but it was often used for Jewish people. They liked that name because it was also a patriarchal name. Simeon was one of the 12 sons of Jacob.

So, it had become one of the most common names in this period. But tanners were associated with strong odors. You were tanning hides from dead animals.

So, they lived outside cities. They weren't allowed to live inside the city limits because the neighbors would cause trouble. Later rabbis even went so far as to say that wives could divorce tanners if they couldn't stand the smell.

Well, many were more lenient, however, if the tannery was near water as it is here. This is a Jewish tanner. And so, he's doing it near the sea.

This is a coastal town. But what it shows us is that Peter is not being as particular. Of course, he had handled dead fish a lot himself, but he's not being as particular as some very conservative Jews among his contemporaries would have been.

And that's going to be helpful because he's about to be in for the shock of his life as he's sent not just to a tanner, not just to Samaritans, but to a Gentile. And not just any kind of Gentile, but somebody who works for the Roman military in Caesarea of all places where Syrian auxiliaries in the Roman military often did not get along very well with the Jewish community that lived there. Starting with Acts chapter 10 and just introducing Acts chapter 10, we're going to have paired visions, paired visions of Cornelius and Simon Peter.

Those are similar to the paired visions you have of Paul or Saul and Ananias back in chapter 9 and verse 12. This is something that's going to be confirmed. This is a very strategic central transitional section in the book of Acts because we have very few things that are narrated three times in the book of Acts.

But Saul's conversion is one of them. It's narrated in Acts chapter 9. It's narrated in Acts chapter 22 by Paul himself. It's narrated by Paul himself again in Acts chapter 26.

Well, Cornelius, his conversion is narrated here. It's narrated again by Peter, telling it more briefly to the Jerusalem church in chapter 11. And it's narrated again by Peter in chapter 15, briefly, as he's appealing to it as a precedent in support of what's happening among the Gentiles.

So, this occurs in Caesarea Maritima. Caesarea Maritima was the largest Judean city. It's where the Roman governor stayed.

Jerusalem was a very uncomfortable place for him, but there were a lot more Gentiles in Caesarea Maritima. Caesarea Maritima is not the same as Caesarea Philippi that you read about, say, in Matthew 16 or Mark chapter 8. Caesarea Maritima was originally called Stratos Tower. It was renamed by Herod the Great.

Herod built there the best harbor on the Judean coast. A significant part of it remains to this day. We still have monuments.

Archaeologists have studied it. The theater in Caesarea seated about 4,000 people. So, by usual estimates, at least currently, people often estimate the city's population at about 10 times the size of a theater.

Not every resident would be a citizen, and not every citizen necessarily always showed up at the theater. But this might mean that the city had maybe 40,000 people or something. But it was the most significant of the cities on the coast.

It was the residence of the Roman governor of Judea, and also the Roman governor had a lot of troops there. There were five auxiliary cohorts plus cavalry. A cohort consisted of 480 to 600 troops in this period.

This was a period of transition, so it depends. Some cohorts may have been 480, some may have been 600. Five cohorts there, and another cohort in Jerusalem.

A legion was made of 10 cohorts and altogether had about 6,000 troops. But the Syrian soldiers there, the auxiliaries were mainly local recruits. In fact, even in legions by this period, a lot of them were from the local region.

They would be Syrians, although they would be Roman citizens. But among the auxiliary troops, mainly Syrians, they have half of a legion just in Judea, most of them here in Caesarea, except for the cohort in Jerusalem. The Syrian soldiers often sided with the other Syrian residents as opposed to the Jewish residents of the city, something about which the Jewish residents often complained.

The Syrian residents were very attached to the local area. Some of them may be from the local area, and others certainly became attached to it with concubines or so on. In practice, maybe wives, although you weren't really allowed to marry during your 20 years of service.

Centurions. Cornelius is a centurion. A century consisted of about 80 troops.

The name is a century, you'd think it's a hundred, but that was the paper strength. It was about 80 men. Unlike tribunes or legates who were normally from the aristocracy, these were basically political offices.

One would work one's way up through these higher ranks straight out of Rome. But unlike the aristocrats who got those offices, tribunes commanding legions and cohorts, the Greek term for this was a chiliarch, commander of a thousand troops. Again, that's a paper strength.

But usually, centurions just worked their way up through the ranks. So, you'd have some Roman aristocrats who might become centurions, but most of them started as soldiers, and by the end of their 20 years of service, or maybe they chose to stay longer, they became centurions. This group is called the Italian cohort.

That doesn't mean that they were all brought here from Italy. The original cohort may have been from Italy, but it may be made up mainly of Syrians now. We do have evidence for this, not in the particular years of this range because we have very limited evidence, but we do have it from this period.

The Italian cohort is known in Judea in the year 69. It's attested there archaeologically. Cornelius was probably retired by the war of 66 to 70, because you'd retire at the age of 60 from the Roman military, if not before then, because 20 years of service, they normally were enlisted at the age of 18, so well before that.

But Cornelius surely would have had to have retired by the age of 60. So he's not really involved in the Judean-Roman war that may have taken place by the time that Luke may be writing. I'll say just a little bit more about military service, and then we'll be ready for the transition into talking more about Cornelius.

Military service was a preferred occupation, although only probably roughly half of the enlistees survived the full 20 years of service. So, it was taking a big risk from ages, sorry I said 18, ages 17 to 37 normally. Their enlistment became 25 years later in the first century, but in this period, it was still 20 years.

Non-citizens could not join legions, but they could join the auxiliary troops, and that was very useful if you survived, especially if you were not in a heavy-duty military

conflict. Auxiliary troops received Roman citizenship at their discharge, and that was a particular privilege, particularly prestigious if you lived in the eastern Mediterranean world, where sometimes even many of the civic officials did not have Roman citizenship yet in this period. But they would also have to swear oaths of allegiance to the divine emperor.

That was one reason why you didn't have Jewish people serving in the Roman military. We read about soldiers elsewhere in Luke's Acts. Luke seems to, if anything, go out of his way to value them.

Luke chapter 3, we have soldiers who are saying to John the Baptist, well, what must we do? And John says, don't cheat anybody. Don't use your position in an exploitive or abusive way, because they could say, okay, you have to let me use your donkey, you have to let me use your... They had the weapons. Later on in Acts 27, we'll see that Julius, the centurion who's accompanying Paul to Rome, gets passage for them on ships, and he can have food provided for them because he's a soldier and he is a representative of Rome.

But sometimes they exploited it, used it to get things for themselves. In Luke chapter 7, we have a centurion who's God-fearing. In Luke chapter 23, the centurion at the cross confesses Jesus as an innocent man.

Acts chapter 27 is where you have the centurion Julius. You also have centurions taking care of Paul in Acts 24 and so forth. So Luke may be teaching us about the Prince of Peace.

In fact, there's that announcement that contrasts with Emperor Augustus in Luke chapter 2. Augustus has this tax census. People go back to places where they own property to answer the census. And you have this contrast because the mighty emperor, was hailed as Lord.

He was hailed as a Savior and as a God. He was hailed as the bringer of the Pax Romana, the Roman peace, which was really nothing but a legal fiction because he claimed he conquered the known world. And everybody knew they hadn't conquered Parthia, their arch enemies.

They hadn't conquered the Nubians. They hadn't conquered the Germans. They hadn't even conquered the Britons yet.

But in any case, he was hailed as the bringer of peace. And then you have these shepherds who were considered low class. They were normally despised by elite people.

These shepherds are informed by the angel of the Lord and the host of heaven about the true and greatest king who's been born in an animal feeding trough. And this king, the promised one, of him it said, to you is born this day a Savior, the real Savior, who is Christ, the real Lord. On earth, peace, and goodwill towards humanity.

And when Peter's preaching to Cornelius, he's going to speak of Jesus who went about preaching peace. Well, Romans like to hear that. But Romans were not expanding their empire normally by peaceful means.

They'd normally expanded it by conquest as Claudius would be doing in Britain soon after this. Jesus was a prince of peace. And yet talking about peace didn't mean that they didn't care about people who were in military service.

Those people were loved by God. Luke obviously does care about them. He tells us a lot about them.

And the good news is about to go to this, not only soldier but this officer in the Roman military.

This is Dr. Craig Keener in his teaching on the book of Acts. This is session 12 on Acts 9.