

Dr. Craig Keener, Acts, Session 12

Acts 9

Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Study Guide, 4) Briefing Document, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Keener, Acts, Session 12, Acts 9, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Craig Keener's lecture on Acts 9 explores Saul's conversion to Paul. **Keener examines** the historical context, including Saul's acquisition of letters of recommendation and his journey to Damascus, analyzing the significance of the blinding light and subsequent vision. **He details** the role of Ananias in Paul's conversion and the ensuing events in Damascus and Jerusalem. **The lecture also** connects Paul's experience to similar accounts in scripture and highlights the importance of Paul's background and subsequent mission. Finally, **the lecture sets the stage** for the next section of Acts, focusing on Peter and the conversion of Cornelius.

2. 12 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Keener, Acts, Session 12 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (New Testament → Gospels – Acts → Acts).



**Keener_Acts_Session
n12.mp3**

3. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the main themes and important ideas from the provided lecture excerpt by Dr. Craig Keener on Acts 9:

Briefing Document: Dr. Craig Keener on Acts 9

Introduction:

This document summarizes the key points from Dr. Craig Keener's lecture on Acts 9, focusing on the conversion of Saul, his initial activities as a believer, and the miracles performed by Peter in the region. It highlights themes of divine sovereignty, the nature of conversion, early Christian practices, and the spread of the Gospel.

I. Saul's Conversion and Calling (Acts 9:1-19)

- **Divine Sovereignty and Transformation:** The lecture opens by emphasizing God's power to use anyone, even persecutors. Keener notes, "If God can use Saul, God can use any of us." He connects this to 1 Timothy 1, where God's sovereign power is highlighted, transforming a persecutor into an "agent of grace." This echoes other narratives where God "intercepts a persecutor," but here God makes Saul "a vessel for his own purposes."
- **Context of Persecution:** Saul is portrayed as the initiator of the persecution against Christians. Keener explains, "Saul is the one initiating this level of persecution. That's why you have peace in 9:31 after his conversion..." This highlights a direct cause-and-effect relationship and underscores the significance of Saul's radical change.
- **Letters of Recommendation:** Saul sought letters of recommendation from the high priest (likely Caiaphas) to legitimize his mission. Keener contextualizes this practice as common at the time, drawing a parallel to Cicero's use of such letters. This demonstrates the importance of social networks and authority in the ancient world. Keener also notes that Saul's social standing and education (a student of Gamaliel) likely facilitated access to the high priest, despite being a Hellenist.
- **"The Way":** The early Christian movement's self-identification as "the Way" is examined. This label connected to Jewish wisdom traditions and the ministry of John the Baptist. Keener notes "the way of truth and the way of righteousness," while acknowledging that in modern times, the term "the Way" has been appropriated by a cult in the United States.

- **The Theophany:** Saul and his companions were met with a light from heaven, which Keener connects to the "Shekinah," God's presence or glory. This links Saul's calling with similar divine encounters in the Old Testament (Exodus 3, Isaiah 6, Ezekiel 1) and with the annunciation of Jesus's birth in the New Testament. Keener points out that "Luke would expect 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."
- **The Doubled Name:** The doubling of Saul's name ("Saul, Saul") is explained as a common pattern in divine callings, found in Genesis 22:11 (Abraham), Genesis 46:2 (Jacob), Exodus 3:4 (Moses), and 1 Samuel 3:10 (Samuel). This signifies the importance of the message being delivered.
- **Confrontation with Jesus:** Jesus' question to Saul, "Why are you persecuting me?", reveals that persecution of believers is equivalent to persecuting Christ himself. Keener refers to Luke 10:16, "If they reject you, they reject me," to clarify this point. This reveals the intimate connection between Christ and his followers.
- **Instruction and Blindness:** After the confrontation, Saul is instructed to go to Damascus for further instructions. The language of what he "must do" echoes language used by the crowds asking how to be saved in other parts of Luke's Gospel. Keener also notes Saul's blindness recalls the blinding of the men of Sodom and connects it to Zechariah's muteness. This blindness becomes a sign of his spiritual condition before his conversion. The three-day fast, often linked with mourning or repentance, reflects Saul's profound spiritual struggle.
- **Ananias and the Vision:** Jesus also appears to Ananias, asking him to go to Saul, who has now received a vision. The coordinated visions are uncommon, thus "confirms divine coordination," according to Keener. This is similar to the paired visions of Cornelius and Peter later in Acts, reinforcing the idea that these are not coincidences.
- **Ananias' Obedience:** Despite his fear, Ananias obeys God's instructions, recognizing Saul as a "chosen vessel," highlighting the importance of obedience to divine commands even when they seem illogical or risky. Keener emphasizes this by noting that Ananias' response, "Here I am", reflects Old Testament figures.

- **Hospitality and Jewish Culture:** The narrative notes that Saul is staying with Judas on "Straight Street," highlighting the emphasis on Jewish hospitality in the Mediterranean world. Keener states "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" emphasizing the reciprocal nature of social relations in that period.
- **Restored Sight and Baptism:** The scales falling from Saul's eyes is likened to the healing of Tobit, signifying his spiritual healing, not just physical. Saul's baptism signifies his entry into the Christian community and his public commitment to Christ. Keener points out that the location, possibly the Barada River, where Saul was baptized, was a typical place for baptism.

II. Saul's Initial Activities and Challenges (Acts 9:19-31)

- **Early Preaching and Opposition:** Saul immediately begins preaching in Damascus, but faces opposition. Keener draws a parallel between the response to Saul's preaching and the response to Jesus' early ministry in Luke 4. The initial response mirrors that of Jesus' own preaching.
- **Paul's Time in Arabia:** Keener acknowledges that Galatians 1 mentions Paul's time in Arabia after his conversion, which Luke does not. This highlights Luke's focus on the Jewish opposition in Damascus, whereas Paul himself, in Galatians, emphasizes opposition from the Nabatean Arabs.
- **Escaping Damascus:** Saul's escape from Damascus, lowered from the city wall in a basket, mirrors the escapes of Rahab with the spies in Joshua 2:15, and David in 1 Samuel 19. This biblical precedent demonstrates the common use of such escape routes. Keener notes that houses could be built into the walls, which helped with the escape.
- **Return to Jerusalem and Rejection:** Saul's initial reception in Jerusalem is marked by fear and suspicion. Barnabas' role as a "son of encouragement" is highlighted as he introduces Saul to the apostles, underscoring the importance of mentorship and acceptance within the community.
- **Debates and Threats:** Saul's public debates with Hellenistic Jews lead to further threats on his life, similar to Stephen's experience. His persecution even after conversion shows the dangers of being a committed follower of Christ.

- **Saul's Zealousness:** Keener highlights Saul's zeal for truth, while acknowledging that zealousness can be good, though it also needs guidance and discernment. He notes, "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."
- **Time in Tarsus:** Saul is sent back to Tarsus, his hometown. This is seen as a time of preparation for his future ministry. Keener notes that "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." This emphasized that the call to ministry can often be a process, and not an immediate event.

III. Peter's Miracles and Ministry (Acts 9:32-43)

- **Peter's Itinerant Ministry:** Peter follows in the footsteps of Philip, traveling to places where the gospel has been preached. He performs miracles in Lydda and Joppa, expanding the early church's reach.
- **Healing of Aeneas:** Peter's healing of Aeneas demonstrates the continuation of Jesus' ministry of healing, with the same power and authority. This event leads to a widespread conversion in Lydda and Sharon. Keener observes that there was a "very strong Christian presence in Lydda" in the second century, suggesting an enduring impact.
- **Raising of Tabitha (Dorcas):** The raising of Tabitha (Dorcas) in Joppa mirrors Jesus' raising of Jairus' daughter and the widow of Nain's son, emphasizing the divine power available through the apostles. Keener also notes parallels between the raising of Tabitha, Elisha and the Shunamite's son, and Elijah and the widow of Zarephath's son, thereby highlighting the connection between the Old and New Testaments. The careful detail in the narrative shows that the author "wants to record them" where these details are present, showing continuity in God's work.
- **Peter's Actions Parallel Old Testament Prophets:** Keener emphasizes that Peter's actions and the narrative details closely resemble those of the Old Testament prophets, suggesting a similar divine working in these circumstances.
- **Significance of Simon the Tanner:** Peter's willingness to stay with Simon the Tanner, a person associated with impurity in Jewish culture, highlights his breaking down of social barriers and openness to all, a shift that will become clearer in the following chapter when Peter goes to Cornelius. This act of staying with a tanner "shows us that Peter is not being as particular as some very conservative Jews among his contemporaries would have been," says Keener.

- **Transition to Cornelius:** The lecture concludes by previewing Acts 10 and the paired visions of Cornelius and Peter. This is framed as a strategic moment in Acts, similar to Saul's conversion in that it is narrated three times. Keener notes that this emphasis reinforces the idea that this narrative is crucial. The setting in Caesarea Maritima is emphasized as the place where the Roman governor resided.

IV. Background Information: Roman Military and Context

- **Caesarea Maritima:** The city's significance as a major city with a harbor, large theater, large military presence (five auxiliary cohorts), and Roman governor's residence is discussed.
- **The Roman Military:** Keener talks about centurions, the Italian cohort, and how they were usually promoted through the ranks from normal soldiers. He touches upon the length of service (usually 20 years) and that auxiliary troops could obtain Roman citizenship at discharge.
- **Roman Military Service and the Prince of Peace:** Keener emphasizes Luke's positive portrayal of soldiers. He connects this to the theme of "peace" contrasting with "Pax Romana," the peace achieved through conquest. Jesus, the Prince of Peace, is different. While some soldiers were exploiting their position, others, such as the centurions in Acts, had faith and good character. He points out that "Luke seems to, if anything, go out of his way to value them."

Conclusion:

Dr. Keener's lecture on Acts 9 provides valuable insights into the transformative power of the Gospel, the role of divine intervention, the nature of early Christian practice and the cultural and historical context in which the events of Acts unfolded. The contrasting stories of Saul's dramatic conversion and Peter's ministry highlight both the personal and communal aspects of faith and mission. The lecture also sets up the context for the significant shift into Gentile inclusion.

4. Acts Study Guide: Session 12, Acts 9

Acts, Chapter 9: Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. What was the purpose of the letters of recommendation Saul sought from the high priest?
2. How did the early Christian movement come to be known as "the Way"?
3. Describe the significance of the light from heaven that appeared to Saul on the road to Damascus.
4. What question did Jesus ask Saul after his fall to the ground, and what did this question reveal about Jesus's relationship to his followers?
5. What instructions did Jesus give to Saul following his blinding on the road to Damascus?
6. Why did Ananias initially hesitate when the Lord commanded him to go to Saul?
7. What is the significance of the paired visions of Saul and Ananias, and how does this connect with other paired visions in the Book of Acts?
8. What parallel responses did Saul face in both Damascus and Jerusalem, and what was the result of these oppositions?
9. Describe the significance of Peter's stay with Simon the tanner, and how this might have challenged traditional Jewish norms.
10. Explain the importance of Caesarea Maritima in the narrative of Acts, and how it relates to the Roman military.

Answer Key

1. Saul sought letters of recommendation from the high priest to demonstrate his authority and gain the cooperation of synagogues in Damascus for his mission to arrest Christians. These letters would show the high priest's support and make Saul's actions more compelling in the eyes of the Jewish community.

2. The early Christian movement was called "the Way" because it echoed the Jewish wisdom tradition of "the way of truth and righteousness" as well as John the Baptist's "way of the Lord." The Essenes also used this term. This name signified a divine path and a specific way of life, differentiating it from other beliefs.
3. The light from heaven that appeared to Saul was understood as the *Shekinah*, the glory or presence of God, similar to the divine manifestations at Mount Sinai. This miraculous light accompanied a divine calling, signaling that this was a theophany indicating a direct encounter with God.
4. Jesus asked Saul, "Why are you persecuting me?" This question revealed that Jesus identified himself with his followers. The persecution of Christians was, in fact, persecution of Jesus, highlighting their unity and representing the connection between Christ and the church.
5. After blinding Saul, Jesus instructed him to go into Damascus, where he would receive further directions about what he must do. This set the stage for Saul's transformation and revealed that his specific mission was yet to be disclosed through Ananias.
6. Ananias initially hesitated when the Lord commanded him to go to Saul because Saul had a reputation for persecuting Christians. Ananias was aware of Saul's past actions and was concerned about the potential danger of approaching him.
7. The paired visions of Saul and Ananias confirmed the divine orchestration of Saul's conversion, showing it was not a mere coincidence or hallucination. The parallel with other paired visions in Acts, such as that of Cornelius and Peter, underscores divine coordination and the importance of the events.
8. Saul faced similar opposition in Damascus and Jerusalem: his preaching angered the Jewish community, resulting in plots against his life. As a result, Saul had to flee, highlighting the pattern of rejection and the need to be sent away for his safety.
9. Peter's stay with Simon the tanner was significant because tanners were considered ritually unclean due to their work with dead animals. This showed Peter's willingness to break from traditional Jewish norms and foreshadowed the inclusion of Gentiles in the Christian movement.
10. Caesarea Maritima was important because it was the largest Judean city, the residence of the Roman governor, and housed a significant Roman military presence, including the Italian cohort. The encounter with Cornelius, a centurion

stationed there, marked a pivotal moment in the expansion of the gospel to the Gentiles.

Essay Questions

1. Analyze the significance of Saul's transformation in Acts 9, considering both the divine encounter on the road to Damascus and his subsequent interactions with Ananias and the Christian community in Damascus and Jerusalem.
2. Compare and contrast the calls of Saul and Moses, using the Old Testament as a backdrop, exploring the concept of divine interruption and its impact on the trajectory of both individuals.
3. Discuss the theme of "the Way" as it is presented in the early chapters of Acts, examining its significance for the early Christian movement and how it distinguished itself from other Jewish groups.
4. Explore the social and cultural context of hospitality in the ancient Mediterranean world, and assess how these practices are portrayed in the story of Saul's conversion and Ananias's mission.
5. Examine the narrative of both Saul/Paul's and Peter's interactions with groups on the margins of Judaism (Hellenists and Gentiles), exploring how these narratives contribute to Luke's broader theological aims.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Diaspora:** Jewish communities living outside of Judea.
- **Epistolary:** Relating to letters; often refers to literary works or narratives presented in the form of letters.
- **Essenes:** A Jewish ascetic sect that emphasized ritual purity and believed they were the righteous remnant of Israel.
- **Ethnarch:** The ruler of a people, often under the authority of a higher power.
- **Galilee:** A northern region of ancient Palestine, separate from Judea.
- **Hellenist Jews:** Jews who adopted Greek language and culture, often living in the Diaspora.

- **Hodos:** Greek word for "way" or "path," used metaphorically to describe a way of life or belief.
- **Hyperbole:** Exaggerated statements or claims not meant to be taken literally.
- **Joppa (Jaffa):** An ancient port city on the coast of Judea, known as Tel Aviv today.
- **Judea:** The southern region of ancient Palestine, including Jerusalem.
- **Kuria:** Greek word for "Lord," a respectful title that could also be applied to God or deities.
- **Lydda:** A town in the coastal plain of Judea, near Joppa.
- **Nabateans:** An ancient Arab people who inhabited a territory east and south of Judea and Damascus.
- **Pax Romana:** The Roman Peace, a period of relative peace and stability within the Roman Empire.
- **Perea:** The region east of the Jordan River, under the rule of Herod Antipas.
- **Reciprocity:** The social expectation of returning favors or debts, common in the ancient world.
- **Sanhedrin:** The supreme council of the Jewish people in Jerusalem.
- **Septuagint:** The Greek translation of the Old Testament.
- **Shekinah:** The visible manifestation of God's presence or glory.
- **Tarsus:** A major city in Cilicia, where Paul was from.
- **Theophany:** A visible manifestation of God to humankind.
- **The Way:** A title the early Christian movement used to describe itself.
- **Tertiary Level Education:** Higher-level education, often involving advanced study of literature, philosophy or religion.
- **Centurion:** A Roman military officer in charge of a century (80 soldiers).
- **Cohort:** A Roman military unit, typically comprised of 480-600 soldiers.
- **Caesarea Maritima:** A major coastal city in Judea, where the Roman governor resided.

5. FAQs on Keener, Acts, Session 12, Acts 9 Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ on Acts 9 and Related Themes

1. **How does the conversion of Saul (later Paul) demonstrate God's power?** Dr. Keener explains that Saul, a persecutor of the early church, was "arrested by the Lord himself" and transformed into an agent of grace. This highlights God's sovereign power, showing that if God can use someone like Saul, He can use anyone. This is also noted in 1 Timothy 1, where it's mentioned that God can turn persecutors into vessels for his purposes. Saul's radical transformation illustrates that God's grace can reach anyone, no matter their past actions.
2. **What were "letters of recommendation" in the first century, and how did Saul use them?** In the ancient world, letters of recommendation were a common way to advance socially. Saul obtained such letters from the high priest to give him the authority to persecute Christians in Damascus. These letters would have carried significant weight, suggesting the high priest supported his mission. These letters were more than just endorsements; they were social currency that could open doors for the letter-holder.
3. **Why was the early Christian movement referred to as "the Way"?** "The Way" was a term used by the early Christians to describe their movement. This was not a new concept, as Jewish wisdom spoke of the "way of truth" and "way of righteousness", and the Essenes claimed to preach the "divine path". John the Baptist also used "the way of the Lord" in his call for repentance, creating a path for a new exodus. This term was a way for the early Christians to differentiate themselves while staying true to the underlying religious principles.
4. **What is the significance of the "light from heaven" that Saul experienced on the road to Damascus?** The light from heaven was a theophany, a manifestation of God's presence and glory (Shekinah). This is similar to other biblical theophanies, such as the burning bush in Exodus 3, or Isaiah's vision in Isaiah 6. These moments are usually coupled with a divine calling. The light that appeared during Jesus' birth is the same glory that appeared to Saul. Thus, Saul would recognize this light as a manifestation of the Lord.

5. **What is the significance of Saul being addressed twice by his name ("Saul, Saul")?** When God spoke to key figures in the Old Testament to impart a significant message or calling, their name was often repeated. Instances like "Abraham, Abraham," "Jacob, Jacob," "Moses, Moses," and "Samuel, Samuel," are similar to what occurs with Saul. The repetition of Saul's name indicates that God is about to communicate something of profound importance to him.
6. **How did Ananias, a follower of Jesus, react to God's instruction to visit Saul?** Ananias was hesitant to visit Saul because he knew of Saul's reputation as a persecutor of Christians. However, Ananias eventually obeyed God's instruction. God revealed to Ananias that Saul was a chosen vessel. This shows the early Christians were able to overcome their fear of someone they saw as an enemy and welcome him as a brother. Ananias' obedience underscores that God's plans can often challenge our expectations and that obedience, even when it's risky, is vital.
7. **How does the healing of Tabitha (Dorcas) in Joppa demonstrate God's power?** The raising of Tabitha from the dead is a powerful miracle performed by Peter. She was a benefactor who took care of widows in Joppa. Her death caused significant mourning, which led to Peter's arrival. This miracle echoes other resurrection narratives in the Old Testament, such as Elijah raising the widow of Zarephath's son and Elisha raising the Shunammite's son. This event showed a new demonstration of divine power that spread through the area, converting many more people.
8. **Why is it significant that Peter stayed with Simon the Tanner?** Simon was a tanner, a profession that was looked down upon due to the handling of dead animals, making it an unclean profession. By staying with Simon, Peter was moving beyond the cultural norms of the time, indicating that he was becoming less exclusive in his approach to Jewish law, which helped to lay the groundwork for the inclusion of Gentiles into the Christian community. The fact that Peter was willing to stay with him indicates that he was now open to the people outside of the Jewish community.