

Acts 9B

- Tonight we rejoin the introductory story of Saul, which Luke has retold before rejoining the ministry of Peter
 - Last time we met, Saul had seen the Lord, been converted and began preaching to Jews in Damascus
 - His conversion confounded everyone and angered the Jews especially
 - They lost one of their strongest weapons against the early Christians
 - And he had become a powerful tool of the Church
 - But the Jew's anger turns on Paul

[Acts 9:23](#) ¶ When many days had elapsed, the Jews plotted together to do away with him,

[Acts 9:24](#) but their plot became known to Saul. They were also watching the gates day and night so that they might put him to death;

[Acts 9:25](#) but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a large basket.

- The phrase “many days elapsed” actually means when the days were fulfilled
 - Luke means when the time for Paul's preaching to move beyond Damascus
 - God's sovereignty is still the center for all that happens here
 - Just as the church moved outward from Jerusalem by means of persecution, similarly Paul's ministry will move outward by persecution
 - Ironic, especially considering it was Saul's persecuting of Christians that began the first movement
 - Also, Luke skips over a three year period in that phrase
 - In Galatians, Paul tells us that a considerable period of time elapsed in between

[Gal. 1:13](#) ¶ For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it;

[Gal. 1:14](#) and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions.

[Gal. 1:15](#) But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased

[Gal. 1:16](#) to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood,

[Gal. 1:17](#) nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus.

- Paul left Damascus initially, and Paul says he did so because he didn't want to consult with blood and flesh
 - The obvious conclusion is that he consulted with someone other than flesh and blood
 - With the Spirit and with the Lord
 - Paul describes part of his experience in Arabia in the third person

[2Cor. 12:2](#) I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago — whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows — such a man was caught up to the third heaven.

[2Cor. 12:3](#) And I know how such a man — whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows —

[2Cor. 12:4](#) was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak.

- The distinction in Paul's calling and extraordinary degree of his knowledge was a result of his special appointment by Christ
 - The reason so much Scripture came from Paul was the direct result his unique conversion and commissioning
- In Damascus, the Jews appealed to the Roman authorities to get Paul arrested
 - As with Jesus, they made false accusations
 - And Paul says they convinced the ethnarch to arrest him

[2Cor. 11:30](#) ¶ If I have to boast, I will boast of what pertains to my weakness.

[2Cor. 11:31](#) The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, He who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying.

[2Cor. 11:32](#) In Damascus the ethnarch under Aretas the king was guarding the city of the Damascenes in order to seize me,

[2Cor. 11:33](#) and I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and so escaped his hands.

- Notice that Paul saw this event as a shameful way for him to leave the city
 - Also, notice that Paul had disciples in Damascus
 - His preaching had resulted in converts who followed his teaching
- Having left the city, Paul arrives at Jerusalem

[Acts 9:26](#) When he came to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple.

[Acts 9:27](#) But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how at Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus.

[Acts 9:28](#) And he was with them, moving about freely in Jerusalem, speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord.

[Acts 9:29](#) And he was talking and arguing with the Hellenistic Jews; but they were attempting to put him to death.

[Acts 9:30](#) But when the brethren learned of it, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus.

[Acts 9:31](#) So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase.

- Naturally, when Paul came to the city he wanted to associated with other Christians
 - Had he not been converted, he would have immediately reported to the Sanhedrin upon his return
 - But of course as a Christian, Paul sought a new group with which to fellowship
 - Equally naturally, the group wanted nothing to do with him
 - The last time they saw Saul was a mere three years earlier
 - They had probably heard rumors about some strange occurrence involving Saul on the road and of his blindness and supposed conversion
 - But then he disappeared for three years, leaving people to debate and argue over what really happened

- Suddenly Saul appears three years later and says he follows Jesus and wants to fellowship
 - Seems too good to be true and probably a trick
 - So they reject him
- In fact, if we read Paul's own account again in Gal, we see that Paul failed to ever associate with the Jerusalem church, at least at this point in his ministry

[Gal. 1:18](#) ¶ Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days.

[Gal. 1:19](#) But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord's brother.

[Gal. 1:20](#) (Now in what I am writing to you, I assure you before God that I am not lying.)

[Gal. 1:21](#) Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia.

[Gal. 1:22](#) I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea which were in Christ;

[Gal. 1:23](#) but only, they kept hearing, "He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy."

[Gal. 1:24](#) And they were glorifying God because of me.

- Based on Barnabas' testimony, Paul is able to gain an audience with Peter and stayed with him 15 days
 - It probably required that long for Peter to become convinced of Paul's conversion
 - The last time Peter saw Paul, he was standing over the body of Stephen
 - Now he was eating in Peter's house
 - Probably more than other other person, Paul understood the meaning of the words he wrote

[2Cor. 5:17](#) Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a **new creature**; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

- Paul's conversion truly created a new human being
- In addition to Peter, Paul met with James, who was the leader of the Jerusalem church
 - But notice that Paul says he saw no other disciples

- In fact, in v.22 Paul says that no disciples in Jerusalem knew him by sight
- They only heard that the one previously persecuting them was running about the city preaching Christ
- Back in Acts, Luke gives us the same description
 - In v.27 Barnabas introduced Paul to the apostles
 - That would be Peter and James
 - Then Luke says Paul moved freely about the city preaching to the Jews
 - That was what the church heard about, yet they never associated directly with Paul
- Paul's point in Gal 1 emphasizing that the church didn't associate with him while he preached in Jerusalem was to highlight that his message came from God and not men
 - And his ministry was uniquely appointed to be independent from the ministry other men were pursuing
- But eventually, Paul's preaching upset the Jews in Jerusalem as well, and they ran him out of town as well
 - Do you notice a pattern here?
 - The Gospel has been preached to Jews, who rejected it and persecuted it
 - So God sent the message to the Samaritans as He promised
 - But the message still went out to the Jews
 - And again they rejected it
 - So now it will go outward again, even farther than before
 - To Tarsus
 - Paul mentioned this trip in Gal 1 as well, calling it Syria and Cilicia
 - Paul stayed in Tarsus for 10 years

- And his conversion is credited with a peaceful period for the church in Judea and Galilee and Samaria
- Having told the story of Paul's conversion, Luke is ready to return to Peter's ministry
 - Remember, it's been decades since Christ's death and resurrection, and still the Gospel as yet to reach the Gentiles in a serious way
 - It's still largely confined to the Jews and Samaritans
 - And yet Paul has been called to be the Apostle to the Gentiles
 - Still, Paul is preaching to Jews exclusively so far
 - As is Peter
 - But Peter has the keys to the Kingdom
 - So before the Gospel will be received by the Gospels, Peter himself must be involved in that process
 - He must turn the key to open the Gospel for the Gentiles
 - So before Luke can tell his next installment in the spread of the Gospel, he must show how the barrier to the spread of the Gospel to the Gentiles is breached
 - And it is breached with the holder of the keys: Peter

[Acts 9:32](#) ¶ Now as Peter was traveling through all those regions, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda.

[Acts 9:33](#) There he found a man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years, for he was paralyzed.

[Acts 9:34](#) Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; get up and make your bed." Immediately he got up.

[Acts 9:35](#) And all who lived at Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.

- Peter was traveling through Judea, Galilee and Samaria
 - James held down the fort in Jerusalem, but Peter was the traveling apostle preaching the Gospel throughout the lands of Israel
 - Notice that Peter is focused entirely on Jews (or near Jews in the case of the Samaritans)
 - At one point he reaches Lydda and Joppa, Jewish seaports where Peter finds believers already living

- They were probably Jews dispersed from Jerusalem or converted by Philip's ministry
 - Today, the main Israeli airport is located at Lydda,
- And Peter does what must have been routine for the chief Apostle
 - He heals a man, this time a believer who was paralyzed
 - Peter prays, feels the Spirit's leading, and calls upon the man to stand
 - The man is healed and it brings many to believe
- But Luke says that all who lived at Lydia and Sharon turned to the Lord
 - At first glance, we might think that Peter's miracle converted an entire city
 - Reminiscent of Jonah, who interestingly also passed through Joppa
 - But the phrase "all who lived at Lydda" means all who dwell in the city natively, in other words, the Jews of the city
 - The majority of the city were Gentile, so Luke is saying that the minority Jewish population came to faith through the miracle
- This miracle is followed by a summons from Joppa

[Acts 9:36](#) ¶ Now in Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which translated in Greek is called Dorcas); this woman was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity which she continually did.

[Acts 9:37](#) And it happened at that time that she fell sick and died; and when they had washed her body, they laid it in an upper room.

[Acts 9:38](#) Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, having heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him, imploring him, "Do not delay in coming to us."

[Acts 9:39](#) So Peter arose and went with them. When he arrived, they brought him into the upper room; and all the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing all the tunics and garments that Dorcas used to make while she was with them.

[Acts 9:40](#) But Peter sent them all out and knelt down and prayed, and turning to the body, he said, "Tabitha, arise." And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up.

[Acts 9:41](#) And he gave her his hand and raised her up; and calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive.

[Acts 9:42](#) It became known all over Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.

[Acts 9:43](#) And Peter stayed many days in Joppa with a tanner named Simon.

- A well-liked believer, Tabitha (or in Greek Dorcas) dies in Joppa
 - And Joppa is about 10 miles away from Lydda
 - So the disciples call for Peter to come quickly
 - Why should Peter come quickly if the woman has already died?
 - The fact that believers thought Peter could help them in this situation tells us that the Apostles had earned a reputation of raising people from the dead
 - And the fact that they had to call an Apostle to get this miracle is also proof that it such miracles weren't gifts common to all believers (otherwise why call for Peter specifically?)
- The woman has been prepared for burial in the traditional Jewish way
 - But when Peter arrived, many widows were standing around her body mourning and showing Peter the clothing Dorcas had made for them
 - It seemed to be a display calculated to convince Peter that Dorcas was worthy of resurrection
 - Peter then orders everyone out and prays
 - Then he calls her to arise
- Again, Peter's miracle causes many to believe in the city of Joppa
 - And the result of this success is that Peter stays for a considerable time in the city
 - Peter has ministered to Jews throughout the land
 - But because he hasn't brought the keys of the Gospel to the Gentiles specifically, they remain largely unreached
 - Even in a city like Lydda where there was a tremendous response to the Gospel, the response was limited to Jews
 - And again in Joppa, when Peter chooses to ministry, it's directed at the Jewish believers

- But there are cracks in Peter's wall, as Luke suggests at the very end of the chapter
 - Peter is living at the home of a tanner, an unclean profession among Jews
 - Peter seems to be dropping some of his strict Jewish observance
 - It becomes a tiny bit of foreshadowing for the events of chapter 10

[Acts 10:1](#) ¶ Now there was a man at Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian cohort,

[Acts 10:2](#) a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, and gave many alms to the Jewish people and prayed to God continually.

[Acts 10:3](#) About the ninth hour of the day he clearly saw in a vision an angel of God who had just come in and said to him, "Cornelius!"

[Acts 10:4](#) And fixing his gaze on him and being much alarmed, he said, "What is it, Lord?" And he said to him, "Your prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God.

[Acts 10:5](#) "Now dispatch some men to Joppa and send for a man named Simon, who is also called Peter;

[Acts 10:6](#) he is staying with a tanner named Simon, whose house is by the sea."

- Once again, Peter is to be summoned, but this time by a Gentile centurion in Caesarea
 - The centurion was a noncommissioned officer in the Roman army who commanded 100 troops
 - Something close to an army captain
 - His unit or cohort was a 600-man force called the Italian cohort
 - It's interesting that every reference to centurion in Scripture is positive, and this one is no exception
 - This centurion was a God-fearing man as it turns out
 - He gave sacrificial gifts to the Jews
 - And He prayed to the Jewish God
 - Both of these actions placed him in great danger with Rome
 - So the question is was Cornelius a believer at this point?

- Based on the testimony of Scripture, we would say no
 - Cornelius was God-fearing and sympathetic to the Jewish people
 - He had forsaken the Roman pagan gods including the caesar himself
 - Yet he hadn't come to know of a Messiah nor seek for Him
- Cornelius represented the ultimate Gentile roadblock for Peter and any Jewish evangelist
 - Not only was Cornelius a Gentile, he was a Roman
 - The Romans were hated because they had conquered Judea
 - And not only was he a Roman, he was a Roman soldier who commanded those occupying troops
 - Cornelius seems calculated by God to present the greatest possible obstacle for Peter to overcome in preaching the Gospel to Gentiles
 - Yet he was also a man who had been prepared by the Spirit to receive the Gospel readily when the time was right
- So the scene has been set for the Gentiles to enter the church
 - And it begins with a messenger, an angel
 - Who says Cornelius' prayers were a memorial or reminder before God
 - And now God is ready to act
 - Notice hear again how the entire process is coming as a result of God's work to move people into position
 - The angel moves the centurion to dispatch men for Peter
 - Peter doesn't intend to reach out to Gentile, so the Lord is going to send Gentiles to Peter
 - And the details provided are so specific, that they leave Cornelius no doubt concerning its origin - it's from God

Dr. Constable tells of how modern missionaries have told stories of similar seekers after God. After they penetrated some remote tribe and preached the gospel, the natives explained how they had previously worshiped the God the missionary preached and had prayed for more light.

- Notice that the angel gives Cornelius no indication of why he needs to be called for this man Simon
- Yet Cornelius knows to obey
 - And he asks Peter to return with him to Caesarea