

## The Book of Acts - Chapter Nine

### III. Acts 6:1-11:30 - The Witness beyond Jerusalem (continues)

#### Summary of Chapter Nine

The church's persecutor-in-chief received authority from the High Priest to travel to Damascus to arrest any Christians that he could find there, to bring them back to face trial. On his journey the Risen Lord Jesus appeared to him in a blinding light that left him totally blind. During this encounter, Jesus made it clear that he was the object of Saul's persecution.

After this encounter, Saul's companions, who witnessed the light but could not understand the sound of Jesus' voice, led him into Damascus, where he remained alone and blind for three days.

Jesus appeared to a local convert called Ananias and instructed him to go to Saul with a message of all that Saul was now required to do in taking the Gospel to the Gentiles. After a moment of apprehension, Ananias complied, went to Saul, prayed for him and he instantly regained his sight. Saul was baptised and started to preach the Gospel to the Jews and Gentiles in Damascus.

The Jews, with the help of the local governor, hatched a plot to kill Saul and so his companions helped him to escape from the city.

Some time later Saul arrived in Jerusalem, where Barnabas introduced him to Peter and James. He stayed there for about two weeks before the Hellenised Jews tried to kill him so he was instructed to go to Cæsarea and from there to his home city of Tarsus, in Cilicia.

The focus then shifts to Peter, who had left Jerusalem and travelled towards the Mediterranean Sea coast, where he healed a Paralytic called Aeneas in Lydda. He was then called to nearby Joppa, where a woman named Tabitha had died and Peter was used by the Holy Spirit to raise her back to life.

These two miracles were once again used to help in the spreading of the Gospel message and many of the local inhabitants from that region came to faith.

Peter remained in Joppa, in the house of a tanner called Simon.

#### III.e Acts 9:1-31 - The conversion of Saul

The conversion of Saul may seem like something of an interruption in the Acts narrative, since in this section of Acts, chapters 6-12, Luke deals primarily with the witness of the Jerusalem church through the dispersed Hellenists, i.e. Greek-speaking Jews, and the apostle Peter. Paul's conversion fits into this time frame however and, as a Greek-speaking Diaspora Jew, he was a

Hellenist himself, eventually becoming the prime leader in the outreach to the Gentiles. His conversion is related in detail three times in Acts: here in narrative form, and twice subsequently in Paul's testimony before a Jewish mob (Acts 22:3-11), and before King Agrippa II (Acts 26:2-18). Luke does not record the date of Paul's conversion, but a reasonable estimate is circa AD33-34.

Although many commentators refer to Paul as being a Hellenist, they state that it is believed that his parents were native Jews and thus not part of the Diaspora.

### III.e.i Acts 9:1-19a - Saul's conversion

While travelling to Damascus to arrest any Christians who might be there, Saul encountered the risen Christ and, blinded by a dazzling light, was led into the city to await further instructions.

<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest <sup>2</sup> and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

#### Acts 9:1-2

The account of Saul resumes from Acts 8:3. Saul's documents from the High Priest, although not named he would have been Caiaphas, may have been official extradition papers or letters of introduction to the synagogues in Damascus. It is not known how Christianity had come to Damascus, probably through converts at Pentecost or, less likely, by some of those scattered following Stephen's martyrdom, see Acts 8:1. This is the first time in Acts that Christians are described as those who belonged to the Way (Greek hodos, which means road, highway or way of life), meaning either the way of salvation: <<This girl followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved">> (Acts 16:17), which is confirmed in Jesus' teachings: <<But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it>> (Matthew 7:14), and: <<Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me">> (John 14:6), or the true way of life in relation to God: <<He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervour and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately>> (Acts 18:25-26), <<Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers>> (Psalm 1:1), <<For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish>> (Psalm 1:6), <<Teach me your way, O Lord; lead me in a straight path because of my oppressors>> (Psalm 27:11). The expression also occurs at Acts 19:9, 19:23, 22:4, 24:14 and 24:22.

<sup>3</sup> As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.

#### Acts 9:3

Damascus was 135 miles or 217 km northeast of Jerusalem, a six-day journey by foot. Settled as early as the second millennium BC, Damascus was an oasis on the border of the Arabian desert, and was on the main route from Mesopotamia to Egypt. The Nabataean king Aretas IV maintained an ethnarch, i.e. governor, in Damascus, which is confirmed by Paul: <<In Damascus the governor under King Aretas had the city of the Damascenes guarded in order to arrest me>> (2 Corinthians 11:32).

Although modern Damascus is built on the ruins of the ancient city, one can still see the Straight Street (v.11) running east to west with its East Gate and monumental arch. Also

visible are the ancient theatre and the concentric courts of its temple to Jupiter, now replaced by a mosque. Jewish presence in Damascus, assumed by the mention of synagogues in v.2 and v.20, is confirmed in Josephus' record that many thousands of Jewish people were killed in Damascus during the time of the First Jewish Revolt in AD66-73, see Jewish War 2.559-561.

For the brilliance of the light, we have Paul's description given in Jerusalem: <<About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me>> (Acts 22:6), and before King Agrippa II: <<About noon, O king, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions>> (Acts 26:13), thus it is described as exceeding the midday sun.

<sup>4</sup> He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

#### Acts 9:4

Jesus called Saul by name: <<For the sake of Jacob my servant, of Israel my chosen, I summon you by name and bestow on you a title of honour, though you do not acknowledge me>> (Isaiah 45:4), because he foreknew him as he did with Moses (Exodus 33:12), Nathaniel (John 1:48) and Zacchæus (Luke 19:5). The doubling of his name, 'Saul, Saul' adds emphasis to ensure there is no doubt who is being spoken to and also adds a note of compassion such as with: <<Samuel, Samuel>> (1 Samuel 3:4), <<Martha, Martha>> (Luke 10:41), <<Simon, Simon>> (Luke 22:31), and even: <<O Jerusalem, Jerusalem>> (Matthew 23:37), or three times: <<O land, land, land, hear the word of the LORD!>> (Jeremiah 22:29).

Jesus' reference to Saul's action why do you persecute me? shows his close identity with his followers: to persecute Christians is to persecute Christ.

<sup>5</sup> "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. <sup>6</sup> "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

#### Acts 9:5-6

Who are you, Lord? Though Paul was ultimately blinded by the bright light, as confirmed in v.3 and vv.8-9, he indicates elsewhere that he actually saw the risen Christ on this occasion: <<Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord?>> (1 Corinthians 9:1), <<and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born>> (1 Corinthians 15:8), and: <<to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles>> (Galatians 1:16a). See also v.27. The scene is significant not only because of Saul's conversion but because it also shows that he would have known of the resurrection from direct experience of Jesus, and thus could come to appreciate why this was a key part of the Christian message, see 1 Corinthians Chapter 15.

This dramatic experience immediately changed Saul: <<Or ever I was aware>> (Song 6:12a). Jesus is: <<the light of the world>> (John 8:12), and he: <<made his light shine in our hearts>> (2 Corinthians 4:6), and, because of him, we are now: <<children of light>> (Ephesians 5:8).

<sup>7</sup> The men travelling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone.

#### Acts 9:7

Saul's companions heard the sound, i.e. the Lord's voice, but did not see anyone. In a later testimony to the Jews, Paul spoke of them seeing the light but not understanding the voice

(Acts 22:9). They had no vision of Jesus nor did they hear the message to Saul, but they could testify to a brilliant light and a sound, which pointed to an objective event that was not a matter of Saul's imagination.

A similar incident had occurred during Jesus ministry, when Jesus, praying publically in the temple, said: <<Father, glorify your name!" Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him. Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine">> (John 12:28-30).

At other times others do understand God's voice such as the occasion when he gave them the commandments at Mount Horeb, recorded in Exodus 20:1-18, at the baptism of Jesus: <<And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" >> (Matthew 3:17), on the Mount of Transfiguration: <<Then a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!" >> (Mark 9:7). Therefore, it is not surprising that Saul should hear him on this occasion: <<Then he said: The God of our fathers has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth>> (Acts 22:14). We too can hear the voice of God when we hear or read his word: <<And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe>> (1 Thessalonians 2:13), and our prayer to God should be: <<let me hear your voice!>> (Song 8:13).

<sup>8</sup> Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. <sup>9</sup> For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

#### Acts 9:9

For three days he was blind reminds us of the days spent in the great fish (Jonah 1:17) and, more recently, the time the Lord was in the tomb (Luke 24:21-22). Saul's blindness and his fasting should not be seen as punishment but as a result of the intensity of his encounter with Christ. However, like the deaf-muteness of Zechariah in Luke Chapter 1, it was designed to produce a time of reflection and prayer (v.11).

He was no doubt in a state of shock and blinded by the light, (of God and truth and right - according to Simon and Garfunkel). Jesus is now saying to Saul the same as he said to the apostles and probably says to each of us as well: <<You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name>> (John 15:6).

#### Acts 9:10-19a

Saul's Encounter with Ananias. Jesus appeared to a believer in Damascus, instructing him to go to Saul, assist him in recovery of his sight, and inform him of his special calling.

<sup>10</sup> In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!"

"Yes, Lord," he answered.

#### Acts 9:10

The Lord is Jesus and not the Father (see v.17).

Ananias's response, 'Yes Lord', or 'Here I am' in some translations, is reminiscent of his OT predecessors such as Abraham (Genesis 22:1 and Genesis 22:11), Jacob (Genesis 31:11 and Genesis 46:2), Moses (Exodus 3:11), Samuel (1 Samuel 3:4-8), and Isaiah (Isaiah 6:8).

<sup>11</sup> The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying.

Acts 9:11

Straight street is one of the world's oldest continually occupied streets, still in existence today; also see comments made about the city in v.3.



Straight Street in Damascus today



Ananias House in Damascus

Tarsus. See comments later on v.30.

<sup>12</sup> In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."

Acts 9:12

The Holy Spirit had already prepared Saul's heart and mind for further revelation, and the assurance of the authenticity of Ananias' message to him when he received it.

<sup>13</sup> "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."

Acts 9:13-14

I have heard many reports. How often do we stop to think about things that we think we know rather than simply responding to the call of Christ on our lives? We will see this again in Chapter 10 when Peter is instructed to: <<Kill and eat>> (Acts 10:13b), unclean animals and fowls, and he responds by saying: <<Surely not, Lord!>> (Acts 10:14a). We are not called to be 'surely not' people in the service of the Kingdom.

<sup>15</sup> But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.

Acts 9:15

Go! Jesus does not even bother to get into a debate with Ananias over Saul but simply, and perhaps sharply, tells him to get on with it. This is reminiscent of just one of the questions God

put to Job to show that He is God and we aren't: <<Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand>> (Job 38:4). We must simply obey his commands without debating them!

In the remainder of Acts, Saul, later called by his Greek name Paul, preached to Gentiles and also to kings, i.e. King Agrippa II in Acts Chapter 26, as well as the people of Israel, since in each city he always went first to Jewish synagogues.

<sup>16</sup> I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”

#### Acts 9:16

Suffer for my name. Paul was under no illusion about what his new life would entail. He'd had a relative life of comfort. A good education, a middle-class background and a trade, and he was well established with the Pharisees and other religious leaders, including the High Priest, in Jerusalem. He gave that all up willingly for the Risen Lord, following this encounter and three days of contemplation and prayer: <<In fact, you even put up with anyone who enslaves you or exploits you or takes advantage of you or pushes himself forward or slaps you in the face. To my shame I admit that we were too weak for that! What anyone else dares to boast about – I am speaking as a fool – I also dare to boast about. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham's descendants? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have laboured and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn? If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is to be praised forever, knows that I am not lying>> (2 Corinthians 11:20-31).

Saul was educated in Tarsus, known as a mini-Athens and was trained in Greek philosophy and poetry before going to the University of Jerusalem, where he trained at the feet of Gamaliel.

Paul could have chosen a much easier way of life but instead he chose the right way.

<sup>17</sup> Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord – Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here – has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”

#### Acts 9:17

Ananias's placing his hands on Saul was a physical symbol of the invisible power of the Holy Spirit coming to heal Saul from his blindness, and to dwell within him in new covenant fullness.

The laying on of hands was done in connection with several things in Acts: healing (Acts 9:17), the gift of the Spirit (Acts 8:18, 9:17 and 19:6), and commissioning to a ministry (Acts 6:6 and Acts 13:3). We see this too when Jacob blessed Joseph's sons Manasseh and Ephraim by laying on hands (Genesis 48:14-20), so too here Ananias did to Saul: <<And without doubt the lesser person is blessed by the greater>> (Hebrews 7:7), but later Saul

would become the greater through this blessing: <<If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all>> (Mark 9:35b).

Ananias calls him brother showing acceptance despite his past reputation and actions. <<Come, let us return to the Lord. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence>> (Hosea 6:1-2), could well have been written with this situation in mind, as could Isaiah 42:7 <<to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness>>. Saul was previously alive without either the law or the Gospel: <<Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died>> (Romans 7:9). Other Pharisees too have claimed not to be blind: <<Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains>> (John 9:41).

<sup>18</sup> Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptised, <sup>19a</sup> and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

#### Acts 9:18-19a

Something like scales fell from Saul's eyes. This physical event was also a symbol that Saul's spiritual blindness had been overcome and he could now see and understand the truth. Paul reveals a related image to us in 2 Corinthians 3:14 <<But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away>>. What this shows is that the light of Christ is not intended to blind but merely to dazzle, so the recipient will see things in a new light.

Was baptised. Through baptism, Saul made an immediate public declaration of his faith in Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah.

By this time Saul must have been hungry and very thirsty but he chose to be baptised first. It is a question of priorities as his later pledge would indicate: <<I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death>> (Philippians 1:20).

Note that the change of Saul's name to Paul, which will be first reported in Acts 13:9, is not connected with his conversion; he continues having a right to both names: the first Jewish; the second Roman. Paul continues to call himself Saul, as do others, until his ministry in Cyprus (Acts 13:9).

Saul in Hebrew means desired and Paul in Latin is little. Saul was not a tall man like his namesake King Saul: <<He had a son named Saul, an impressive young man without equal among the Israelites – a head taller than any of the others>> (1 Samuel 9:2). One account has him as being only 4' 6" but we have no confirmation how accurate that is. It is known that he did not have an imposing stature.

#### III.e.ii Acts 9:19b-31 - Saul in Damascus and Jerusalem

This section reports Saul's witness to Christ in Damascus and Jerusalem. Paul provides an account of this same period in Galatians 1:11-24.

<sup>19b</sup> Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. <sup>20</sup> At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God.

#### Acts 9:19b-20

Saul likely received instructions in the Christian 'way' from the disciples in Damascus and clearly also through the Holy Spirit. In Galatians, Paul notes that during this time he: <<went

immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus>> (Galatians 1:17b). Arabia here means the Nabataean Kingdom, northeast of the Dead Sea, not the Arabian Peninsula.

Synagogues. The pattern of Paul's witness was always to begin in the synagogues and this occurs throughout Acts, as does the pattern of opposition developing there (v.23).

<sup>21</sup> All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?" <sup>22</sup> Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ.

#### Acts 9:21-22

Proving that Jesus is the Christ. Paul would consistently use the scriptures rather than his testimony to prove that Jesus was the long awaited Messiah, who is written about so frequently and consistently in the Jewish scriptures that were read and studied every Sabbath.

Although Paul's testimony is arguably without precedent, he rarely made reference to it in his public ministry. His testimony was not the Good News that he had been instructed to proclaim, only a manifestation of it. Testimonies are powerful but they are no substitute for the real thing.

<sup>23</sup> After many days had gone by, the Jews conspired to kill him,

#### Acts 9:23

The Jews does not mean all Jews of course, since many Jews had believed in Jesus, and Paul himself was a Jew. But from this point forward in Acts, Luke often uses the phrase 'the Jews' as a shorthand expression to refer to Jewish people who opposed the Gospel. In fact, Luke uses the Greek word ioudaioi, which refers specifically to Jewish religious leaders and others under their influence, who opposed the Christian faith at that time. See also Acts 12:3, 13:45, 13:50, 14:4, 17:5, 17:13 and 18:12 for similar occurrences. Often it was the leaders of communities who are involved in the rejection of the Gospel.

Conspired to kill him. Enemies of the Gospel cannot defeat it by free and open debate, as they are debating with the Holy Spirit for whom there is no match, so they often resort to force, falsehood, murder, and governmental suppression (v.29). But the Gospel is from God and cannot be stopped. Elsewhere, Paul specifies that: <<the governor under King Aretas>> was helping in the attempt to kill him (2 Corinthians 11:32-33).

<sup>24</sup> but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him.

#### Acts 9:24

Saul learned of their plan. The Holy Spirit intervened again and again to protect Saul, as we will see when the Jews plan to kill Paul while he was in Roman custody in Jerusalem, the account of which is told in Acts 23:16-22.

The idea of having the perseverance to watch day and night is seen frequently in scripture: <<The hearts of the people cry out to the Lord. O wall of the Daughter of Zion, let your tears flow like a river day and night; give yourself no relief, your eyes no rest>> (Lamentations 2:18), <<You stumble day and night, and the prophets stumble with you>> (Hosea 4:5a), of the prophetess Anna it says: <<She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying>> (Luke 2:37b), Paul warned the Ephesian elders: <<So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and

day with tears>> (Acts 20:31), and to King Agrippa II he speaks of the coming of Jesus as the Christ: <<This is the promise our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night. O king, it is because of this hope that the Jews are accusing me>> (Acts 26:7).

<sup>25</sup> But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall.

#### Acts 9:25

Sometimes God does not call his people to stand and lose their lives but rather to escape from the danger that he has revealed to them. Because his followers took decisive action, Saul's life was preserved for his future ministry, for at that point he had not begun his major missionary journeys or written any of his epistles that would form so much of the NT canon.

Lowered him through an opening in the wall may have been due to a similar construction in Damascus as that found in Jericho, in Rehab's house, where she assisted the Hebrew spies in their escape: <<So she let them down by a rope through the window, for the house she lived in was part of the city wall>> (Joshua 2:15), except that Paul was lowered in a basket.

<sup>26</sup> When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. <sup>27</sup> But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus.

#### Acts 9:27

Barnabas, which means 'son of encouragement' (Acts 4:36), interceded for Saul, introducing him to the apostles in Jerusalem, who were initially sceptical about his conversion. According to Galatians 1:18-19, this visit took place three years after his conversion, which could make this approximately AD37/38, and Paul met with Peter for 15 days but had no substantial interaction with the other apostles, except for meeting James, the brother of Jesus.

Most commentators believe that the calculation of years were not made according to modern standards of counting, which would require 3 full years, but by ancient inclusive methods, in which part of a year was still counted as a year. Paul's three years could have been as little as a month or two from the first year, plus 1 whole year, plus a month or two from the final year, giving 18 months in reality. Thus this meeting may have occurred as early as AD35/36.

<sup>28</sup> So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. <sup>29</sup> He talked and debated with the Grecian Jews, but they tried to kill him.

#### Acts 9:29

The Hellenists, Grecian Jews, here are not the same as the Jewish believers called Hellenists in Acts 6:1. In this instance, they were Jews and not Christians, perhaps some of those who had seized Stephen in Acts 6:8-14. They were from the Diaspora, i.e. Jews who lived outside of Palestine, mainly because of the historic exiles. Their primary language was Greek and not Aramaic.

<sup>30</sup> When the brothers learned of this, they took him down to Cæsarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

## Acts 9:30

Cæsarea was commented on quite fully in Acts 8:40.

To Tarsus. This corresponds to Galatians 1:21, where Paul says he went to Cilicia, the province in which Tarsus was located. Paul would be based in Tarsus and possibly ministered in Syria-Cilicia for the next eight years, circa AD37-44, although we have no confirmed account of these years. However, some of the events of 2 Corinthians 11:23-27 may have occurred during this timeframe, and probably also his intense vision of heaven recorded in 2 Corinthians 12:2-4 <<I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know – God knows. And I know that this man – whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows – was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell>>. Saul is not mentioned again in Acts until Barnabas goes to Tarsus to find him in Acts 11:25.

Paul's was born Tarsus, possibly in AD5. It was a strategically important Cilician city in southeast Asia Minor, on the road from Syria into central Asia Minor. Paul refers to it as: <<no ordinary city>> (Acts 21:39b). Founded on the banks of the River Cydnus, it controlled the important harbour on Lake Rhagma, approximately 5 miles or 8 km south on the Cydnus. The vital Cilician Gates, which allowed passage across the Taurus Mountains, were approximately 25 miles or 40 km to the north.

Alexander the Great had stayed in Tarsus, Pompey had based his campaign against sea pirates in the city, and Antony first met Cleopatra there. Tarsus was known as a home to philosophers, especially those of the Stoic school.

Under the Romans it enjoyed extensive autonomy and freedom of expression but remained part of the empire, thus Paul was a citizen of Rome by birthright: <<The commander went to Paul and asked, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?" "Yes, I am," he answered. Then the commander said, "I had to pay a big price for my citizenship." "But I was born a citizen," Paul replied>> (Acts 22:27-28).

Archæologists have uncovered a basalt lava street with limestone gutters from the NT period, and one can also see the foundations of a huge 2<sup>nd</sup> Century AD temple, known as the Donuktash.

<sup>31</sup> Then the church throughout Judæa, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.

## Acts 9:31

The church throughout all Judæa and Galilee and Samaria. There must have been hundreds of churches in the small cities and towns throughout this large region, but all of them together can be called 'church'. The Greek word *ekklēsia* is singular in the earliest and best manuscripts of this verse, although some later manuscripts have the plural. The NT can apply the singular word church to the church meetings in a home, e.g. <<Greet also the church that meets at their house>> (Romans 16:5), and: <<Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house>> (1 Corinthians 16:19b); in an entire city: <<To the church of God>> (1 Corinthians 1:2a), and: <<To the church of God in Corinth>> (2 Corinthians 1:1c), in a large region, as here, or throughout the whole world: <<And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues>> (1 Corinthians 12:28), and: <<Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her>> (Ephesians 5:25).

Peace came to the church after the conversion of its prime persecutor: <<I was personally unknown to the churches of Judæa that are in Christ. They only heard the report: "The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." And they praised God because of me>> (Galatians 1:22-24).

Fear of the Lord does not mean fear of final judgment but is a common theme in Acts referring either to fear as godly awe, reverential fear, and devotion, as in Acts 2:43, 10:2 and 13:26, or fear of God's displeasure and fatherly discipline, as in Acts 5:5, 5:11, 16:29 and 19:17. The writer to the Hebrews states: <<Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness>> (Hebrews 12:7-10).

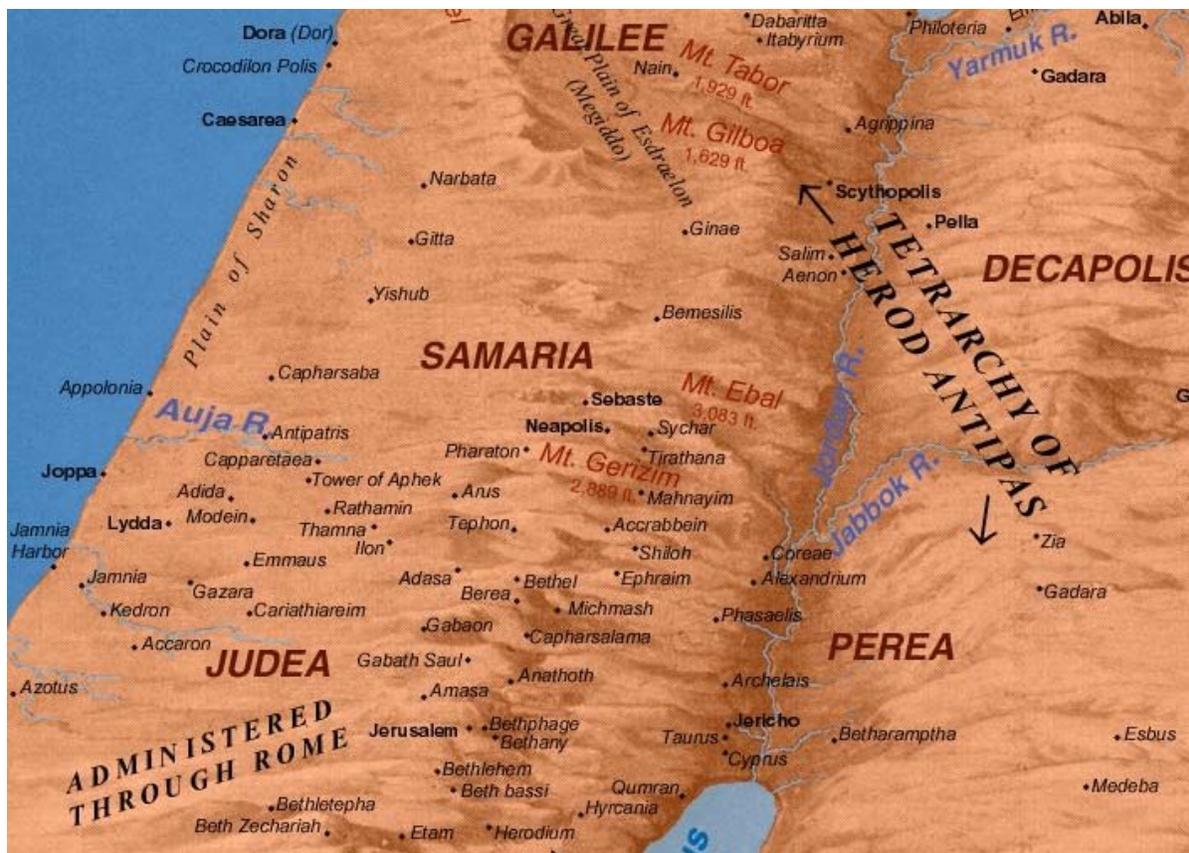
Having reverential fear of God, simply for who he is and what he does, is a very healthy attitude for any disciple to have.

### III.f Acts 9:32-11:18 - Peter preaches in the coastal towns

Peter began to witness outside Jerusalem in the coastal plain of Judæa, healing the lame Aeneas (vv.32-35) and restoring life to Dorcas (vv.36-43). God then led him to witness to a group of Gentiles at Cæsarea (Acts 10:1-11:18).

#### III.f.i Acts 9:32-43 - Aeneas and Dorcas

Peter was last mentioned in his witness to the Samaritans with John (Acts 8:25). Now he turned to the fertile coastal plain of Sharon, where the next two recorded miracles took place.



A Map of Central Palestine

<sup>32</sup> As Peter travelled about the country, he went to visit the saints in Lydda.

[Acts 9:32](#)

[Saints](#) refers to all committed followers of Jesus: <<As for the saints who are in the land, they are the glorious ones in whom is all my delight>> (Psalm 16:3).

[Lydda](#) is the OT Lod, 23 miles or 37 km northwest of Jerusalem on the road to Joppa. Lydda served as a regional administrative town, called a toparchy, for Judæa, and was on an important trade route.

<sup>33</sup> There he found a man named Aeneas, a paralytic who had been bedridden for eight years.

[Acts 9:33](#)

[Eight years](#) points to the severity of his paralysis.

<sup>34</sup> “Aeneas,” Peter said to him, “Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and take care of your mat.” Immediately Aeneas got up.

[Acts 9:34](#)

[Jesus Christ heals you](#). As in the account where Peter and John healed the paralytic in the Temple (Acts 3:6), to heal in the name of Jesus Christ was to invoke his power and presence: <<The Lord will sustain him on his sickbed and restore him from his bed of illness>> (Psalm 41:3). Peter understood that Jesus was invisibly working through the Holy Spirit to build his church.

[Take care of your mat](#) probably refers to folding the mat which he used as a bed and was lying on at the time.

[Immediately](#) once again shows the miracles are clearly of God: <<She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped>> (Luke 8:44), and: <<Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw it, they also praised God>> (Luke 18:43).

<sup>35</sup> All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

[Acts 9:35](#)

[Turned to the Lord](#). As is often the case in Acts, miracles such as this healing led to the advancement of the Gospel. The news spread beyond the town of [Lydda](#) to the whole coastal plain of [Sharon](#).

<sup>36</sup> In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which, when translated, is Dorcas), who was always doing good and helping the poor.

[Acts 9:36](#)

[Joppa](#) was on the coast, 11 miles or 18 km northwest of Lydda. The port city of [Joppa](#), modern Jaffa, is just south of Tel Aviv and is part of that city. It was captured by the Jewish Hasmonæans in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century BC, and contained a substantial Jewish population prior to the First Jewish Revolt in AD66-73. Excavations under portions of the modern city have revealed evidence of 1<sup>st</sup> Century AD residences and an early fortress.

[Tabitha](#) was a [disciple](#) who clearly put her faith to practical use to help the poor widows in her community, probably sharing the Gospel with them as she did so.

Dorcas is Greek and Tabitha is Aramaic and both mean doe, hind or deer. On his deathbed Jacob prophesied: <<Naphtali is a doe set free that bears beautiful fawns>> (Genesis 49:21), and a wife to a kind and loving husband is as a loving doe: <<A loving doe, a graceful deer – may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be captivated by her love>> (Proverbs 5:19).

<sup>37</sup> About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. <sup>38</sup> Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, “Please come at once!”

#### Acts 9:38

Her body was washed. This is normal practice for many cultures from that region even today.

Heard that Peter was in Lydda reflects an understanding that an unusual level of the Holy Spirit’s power was present in the apostles for their fame preceded their work.

Please come at once shows the urgency but also both respect and the lack of compulsion for Peter to follow the commands of men. However, he was no doubt prompted by the Holy Spirit, as on other occasions, to follow these men and undertake the task that Jesus would have in store for him.

<sup>39</sup> Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them.

#### Acts 9:39

In the raising of Jairus’ daughter by Jesus in Luke 8:49-56, professional mourners were present to assist at the funeral and usually included flautists and wailing women to make a commotion. Since bodies decomposed quickly in Palestine, mourners had to assemble fairly soon after a death. However, on this occasion it seems to be genuine friends that had gathered, including all the widows that Dorcas had helped by providing the robes and other clothing she made for them during her lifetime.

<sup>40</sup> Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, “Tabitha, get up.” She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up.

#### Acts 9:40

Sent them all out reminds us of the time when Elisha was used to restore the Shunammite’s son: <<When Elisha reached the house, there was the boy lying dead on his couch. He went in, shut the door on the two of them and prayed to the Lord>> (2 Kings 4:32-33).

Down on his knees and prayed. On this occasion Peter felt the need to pray, whether it was the magnitude of the healing in human terms or simply he felt the need to be in communion, giving thanks for what he knew in his heart was going to transpire. There were other saints in Joppa but whether they felt such a task was beyond their gifts, or whether it was just a case they felt Peter was better placed to undertake such a miraculous work, we are not told. However, by bringing Peter to Joppa, it placed him in the right place to be called for more good work by Cornelius in the next chapter.

Tabitha, get up. This is a command spoken in faith. Peter had no supernatural power in his own words, but the Lord had showed him what he was going to do in response to Peter's prayer, and he imparted to Peter's heart the knowledge and faith that he was going to restore Tabitha to life as Peter spoke.

<sup>41</sup> He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called the believers and the widows and presented her to them alive.

#### Acts 9:41

The Greek verb anistēmi, used for helped her to her feet or raised her up, is the same word used throughout the NT for Jesus' resurrection. Though her restoration to life was not permanent, it served to remind believers of their promised resurrection in Christ.

When considering women like Tabitha, the words of King Lemuel come to mind: <<In her hand she holds the distaff and grasps the spindle with her fingers. She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy>> (Proverbs 31:19-20). A distaff is a stick or spindle onto which wool or flax is wound for spinning.

It should be noted that Tabitha was the sort of woman that, from a human perspective, was worthy of miraculous healing and having her life restored. There are many others who are just as, or even more worthy, at least in our eyes, of such healing, who do not receive it but who seem to suffer in this life and even die young, while at the height of their usefulness. It is not for us to judge or even debate such cases, but just to trust God that all earthly suffering has its purpose, and we must live by faith, trusting always in his judgements and providential plan.

<sup>42</sup> This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord.

#### Acts 9:42

Many people believed in the Lord. Once again, there is the pattern that remarkable miracles lead to many more genuine conversions as the Gospel spreads.

<sup>43</sup> Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon.

#### Acts 9:43

As a tanner, Simon worked with animal hides, which would explain his location close to the ocean breezes (Acts 10:6), which would help to dry the hides without making them brittle. His work meant he was often left in an unclean state, but this was less significant since he was not in Jerusalem. Assuming he was also a convert to the faith then he would have been free from the ceremonial law anyway.

Peter could no doubt have stayed with many people in the region due to his status and reputation, but he chose to stay with an ordinary working man: <<Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited>> (Romans 12:16).



Joppa is mentioned four times in the OT, as one of the cities given to the tribe of Dan (Joshua 19:46), as port-of-entry for the cedars of Lebanon for Solomon's Temple in 2 Chronicles 2:15, as the place where the prophet Jonah embarked for Tarshish (Jonah 1:3), and as port-of-entry for the cedars of Lebanon for the Second Temple of Jerusalem (Ezra 3:7). Joppa is mentioned in the Book of Joshua as the territorial border of the Tribe

of Dan, hence the modern term 'Gush Dan' for the centre of the coastal plain. Many descendants of Dan lived along the coast and earned their living from ship building and sailing.

In the 'Song of Deborah' the prophetess asks: <<And Dan, why did he linger by the ships?>> (Judges 5:17b).

After Canaanite and Philistine domination, David and his son Solomon conquered Joppa and Solomon used its port to bring the cedars from Tyre, which were used in the construction of the Temple. The city remained mostly under Jewish administration even after the split between Judah and the northern tribes of Israel. In 701BC, the days of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, invaded the region from Joppa.

After the Babylonian exile, Joppa, now under Persian rule, was governed by Phoenicians from Tyre. Then it housed troops of Alexander the Great and later became a Seleucid Hellenised sea port, until it was captured by the Maccabæan rebels (1 Maccabees x.76, xiv.5), and the re-established Jewish kingdom. During the Roman repression of the Jewish Revolt, Joppa was captured and burned by Cestius Gallus. Josephus, in Jewish War 2.507-509 and 3:414-426, writes that 8,400 inhabitants of the city were massacred.

Pirates, who operated from the rebuilt port, incurred the wrath of Vespasian, who razed the city and erected a citadel in its place, installing a Roman garrison there.

Due to Peter's ministry in the region and the subsequent vision he would see while staying in Joppa, it has become significant to the Christian faith in that it was the city where Peter received direct instruction from God to share the Gospel with the Gentiles.