

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church
Study of the Book of Acts
Easter Season 2024

Week 3

Chapter 9

The Conversion of Saul. No one else was better suited to the task of spreading the Gospel than Paul: a “Hebrew of the Hebrews”; (Philippians 3:5; Galatians 1:14); a native of Tarsus, thus thoroughly acquainted with Greek culture (17:22–31); a citizen of Rome (16:37); trained in a trade so that he could support himself (18:3) as he traveled and ministered. But before Christ could use this highly gifted man, He first had to transform him. And thus, we have the record of his life-changing encounter with Christ on the Damascus Road! The change in Saul was instantaneous. In less than one week he went from “breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord” (9:1) to “[preaching] the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God” (9:20).

The church was understandably suspicious, but Saul’s powerful and persistent preaching, coupled with efforts by the Jewish authorities to kill him (9:23), finally convinced the apostles that Saul’s conversion was genuine. According to Galatians 1:17–18, Saul/Paul spent some three years in Arabia between the time of his conversion (9:3–6) and his journey to Jerusalem (9:26). According to Luke, following Saul’s acceptance by the apostles, the church enjoyed another growth spurt and a time of peace.

MacArthur, John F.. Acts (p. 46). HarperChristian Resources. Kindle Edition.

Next Peter comes down from the hill country to the coastal plain of Sharon, which extends north to Mt. Carmel, and goes to the city of Lydda. This is the Old Testament city of Lod ([1 Chron. 8:12](#)), and is the site of modern Israel’s International Airport. It is about 10 miles southeast of Joppa at the intersection of the trade routes between Egypt & Damascus & Jerusalem. Lydda had been given to the Jews by Julius Caesar, and they ruled it until their revolt in 66 AD. The Roman commander Cestius burned Lydda to the ground that year when the Jews from Lydda had gone to Jerusalem for the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles.

Verse 35 tells us that “*all who lived at Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.*” The phrase “turned to the Lord (epistrophe) means “to turn around,” and is used in [Acts 3:19](#), [11:21](#); [14:15](#); [15:19](#); [26: 18,20](#), as well as in [2 Cor. 3:16](#); and [1 Thess. 1:9](#) to described salvation in terms of a change in life direction. This is conversion. Do not take the text to imply that the people seeing Aeneas caused their conversion. Paul is clear in [Romans 10:17](#) that *faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ*. Peter would have been proclaiming the gospel throughout the area just as he did in the Temple in Acts 3, and seeing Aeneas made whole was proof of the message that Peter was preaching. The result was that all who lived in the area that were seeing Aeneas (and hearing the gospel) were being converted into disciples of the Lord Jesus.

The on to Joppa which is on the coast. It is the city which received the timbers shipped from Lebanon for Solomon's temple ([2 Chr. 2:16](#)). It is also the city from which Jonah sought to flee the Lord. Like Lydda, it was given to the Jews by Julius Caesar and remained in their control until their revolt in 66 AD. The modern city of Jaffa sits on its site.

In all the healings he performed Peter had made it very clear that it was done by God's power and not his own. Tabitha would be no different. After Peter had prayed, he turned to the body and commanded her, "Tabitha, arise."

https://www.gracebibleny.org/peter_s_expanding_witness_part_1_acts_9_32_43

Chapter 10

Beginning in chapter 10, Luke describes the Spirit's sovereign activity in, of all people, a Gentile army officer stationed on the Mediterranean coast. This is a watershed moment in the history of the church. The one true God—the God of the Hebrews—is about to unveil his eternal plan, hidden through the ages: "that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel" (Ephesians 3:6).

To confirm the Gentiles' acceptance by God and their full inclusion in His kingdom as heirs of grace, Luke records these new converts' experience of the Holy Spirit. Exactly as happened with the Jewish believers at Pentecost (chapter 2), these new Gentile converts began speaking in unlearned foreign languages. The Jewish believers who had accompanied Peter from Joppa (10:23, 45) were amazed. But there was no mistaking what they had just witnessed (verse 46). To show that Peter's evangelistic encounter with the Gentile Cornelius was not a fluke, Luke mentioned the widespread outreach that had begun taking place in Antioch. This effort to preach to non-Jews by believers from Cyprus and Cyrene had both the power and blessing of God on it, so that "a great number believed and turned to the Lord" (verse 21).

MacArthur, John F.. Acts (p. 54). HarperChristian Resources. Kindle Edition.

Chapter 11

The fault for which Peter was initially on trial was that he had eaten with Gentiles ([Acts 11:3](#)). By so doing Peter had outraged the ancestral Law and traditions of his people. Peter's defense was not an argument; it was a statement of the facts. Whatever his critics might say the Holy Spirit had come upon these Gentiles in the most notable way. In [Acts 11:12](#) there is a significant sidelight. Peter says that he took six brethren with him. Together with himself that made seven persons present. In Egyptian law, which the Jews would know well, seven witnesses were necessary completely to prove a case. In Roman law, which they would also know well, seven seals were necessary to authenticate a really important document. So Peter is in effect saying, "I am not arguing with you. I am telling you the facts and of these facts there are seven witnesses. The case is proved."

Another striking feature is that this incident begins a section of Acts where Antioch occupies the center of the stage. Antioch was the third greatest city in the world next to Rome and Alexandria. She stood near the mouth of the river Orontes, fifteen miles from the Mediterranean Sea. She was lovely and cosmopolitan; but she was a byword for luxurious immorality. It seems incredible but nonetheless it is true that it was in a city like this that Christianity took the great stride forward to becoming the religion of the world. We need only think of that to be reminded that no situation is hopeless.

When Barnabas saw the Gentiles being swept into the fellowship of the Church he was glad; but he recognized that someone must be put in charge of this work. That someone must be a man with a double background, a Jew brought up in the Jewish tradition but one who could meet the Gentiles on equal terms. He must be a man of courage, for Antioch was no easy place to be a Christian leader; and he must be skilled in argument in order to meet the double attack of Jews and Gentiles.

Barnabas knew the very man. For nine years or so we have heard nothing of Paul. The last glimpse we had of him he was escaping by way of Caesarea to Tarsus ([Acts 9:30](#)). No doubt for these nine years he had been witnessing for Christ in his native town; but now the task for which he had been destined was ready for him, Barnabas with profound wisdom put him in charge of it. It was in Antioch that the followers of Jesus were first called Christians. The title began as a nickname.

<https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/dsb/acts-11.html>

Chapter 12

Unable to stop the masses from embracing this new faith, the Jews launched a direct attack upon the leaders of the Christians. No more mere threats and warnings (see 4:18–21; 5:40)—this time, Herod had James executed and Peter arrested. Though from a human perspective the situation appeared terribly grim, from a heavenly perspective this was just another occasion to display the infinite power of God— “the kings of the earth ... and the rulers take counsel together, ... He who sits in the heavens shall laugh. The LORD shall hold them in derision” (Psalm 2:2, 4). Contrast Herod’s gruesome end (“eaten by worms”—verse 23) with the grand advance of the good news.

MacArthur, John F.. Acts (p. 54). HarperChristian Resources. Kindle Edition.

This was Herod Agrippa I, the grandson of Herod the Great, who ruled in the days of Jesus’ birth ([Matthew 2:1-16](#)). Herod Agrippa I was also the nephew of Herod Antipas, who had a role in the trial of Jesus ([Luke 23:7-12](#)). No doubt this attack on the Christians was done because it was politically popular for Herod. It pleased many of his citizens who didn’t like Christians. But the death of James shattered the illusion that somehow, the twelve enjoyed a unique Divine protection.

By the sword is stating that James was beheaded. Eusebius relates a story from Clement of Alexandria, who said the soldier guarding James before the judge was so affected by his witness that he declared himself a Christian also and was also willingly executed for Jesus alongside of James (Eusebius, *Church History* 2.9.2-3).

<https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/acts-12/>

Questions to Ponder

This section mentions prayer quite a bit. In these chapters we see the extraordinary things that happen when the children of God call out in faith to their Heavenly Father. What are your prayer habits? Do you feel God hears your prayers? Have you experience healing of any kind due to your relationship with God?

Do you feel you have been prepared for witnessing to Jesus Christ?
How did God sovereignly prepare Cornelius for what was to follow? What did God do to prepare Peter for the momentous event of Gentile inclusion into the church?

What truth was Peter beginning to grasp when he remarked that God shows no partiality (10:34)?
Do you feel the church at large is inclusive? Exclusive?

How is God leading you to cross racial or cultural barriers with the love of Christ? What are some specific actions you can take?