

## *Acts 1 Study and Discussion Questions*

### *Lesson Three: Saul's Conversion and Salvation for the Gentiles – Acts 9-12*

Read Acts 9:1-31.

- 1) Compare the account of Saul's conversion in Acts 9:1-19 with the accounts in Acts 22:6-16 and 26:12-18. Record any information given in the second and third accounts that is not included in the first. **9:1-6:** Saul was en route to Damascus to make prisoners of followers of the Way. Suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice ask, "Why do you persecute Me?" Those accompanying Saul heard a sound but did not see anyone. Saul asked who was speaking and heard "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." Jesus told Saul to go to Damascus and await instructions. Blinded, Saul was led into Damascus where he fasted for three days. Ananias was called by God to go to Saul and restore his sight. Ananias had heard of Saul's reputation, that Saul had come to Damascus to arrest followers of Jesus. But the Lord reassured Ananias, saying that Saul was His chosen instrument to carry His name to the Gentiles, their kings, and Israel, and that Saul would suffer much for Him. Ananias went to Saul, affirming that it was Jesus that Saul had seen. Ananias told Saul that the Lord had sent him to restore his sight and that Saul might be filled with the Holy Spirit. As evidenced by Ananias' words ("brother Saul"), Saul had already been converted and therefore, presumably baptized with the Holy Spirit. At or sometime after his healing (perhaps at his baptism), he was filled with the Holy Spirit. Saul immediately had scales fall from his eyes and he could see. Saul was baptized and ate.
 

**22:6-16** adds the following: Jesus appeared to Saul on the road around noon. Saul's companions saw the light but did not understand the voice (apparently, they saw light and heard some sound, but could not identify Jesus or hear exactly what He was saying). Saul was specifically told that he would receive an assignment in Damascus. Ananias is identified as devout and respectable. Ananias told Saul that God had chosen Saul to know His will, to see Jesus, to hear Him directly, and to be His witness.

**26:12-18** adds the following to both of the above: the light Saul saw was brighter than the sun. Saul's companions fell to the ground along with him. The voice Saul heard spoke in Aramaic. Jesus said, "It is hard for you to kick against the goads (pricks)." Jesus personally told Saul that He had appointed him as His witness, that He would rescue Saul from Jews and Gentiles, and that He was sending Saul to open their eyes and "turn them from Satan to God, so they might receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me."
- 2) Acts 9:22 says Saul was powerfully effective in proving that Jesus was the Christ. How was Saul trained in the ways and teachings of Jesus? Refer to Acts 22:3, 1 Corinthians 15:4-8, and 2 Corinthians 12:2-4 (some scholars believe the "man" Paul refers to is himself), and Galatians 1:11-17 (where an absence of time from Damascus is implied). Saul's superior training in the Law (our Old Testament) gave him an excellent foundation to grasp the person and work of Christ. The Corinthians and Galatians passages indicate that Saul saw Jesus and learned from Him. Many believe Paul spent a period of time (perhaps three years [Galatians 1:18]) in Arabia, where the Lord Jesus personally trained him.
- 3) According to Acts 9:1-31, which two men did God use to bring Saul encouragement when he was a new Christian? What exactly did they do that would have encouraged him? What risk will you take this week to bring encouragement to a person who is difficult for you to approach? God used Ananias and Barnabas to bring Saul encouragement as a young Christian. Because of Saul's reputation, both men had reason to fear him. Nevertheless, Ananias called him "brother Saul" the moment he saw him, and Barnabas was willing to take Saul into the presence of the apostles in Jerusalem. Personal sharing

Read Acts 9:32 -11:1.

- 4) Who is re-introduced in Acts 9:32-43 (preparing us for the important event recorded in chapter 10) and what was he doing? See Luke 5:18-25; 8:1, 49-55. Peter continued to travel outside Jerusalem (8:14; 9:32). Like Jesus, Peter healed paralytics, raised the dead, and preached the Gospel.
- 5) Which verses point out that Cornelius was a Gentile? Cornelius was a Roman Centurion (10:1). Peter stated the Mosaic Law did not allow Jews to associate with Gentiles (10:28). It is also implied in Peter's comment about God not showing favoritism (10:34). The circumcised believers with Peter were astonished that the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles (10:45). The church in Judea heard Gentiles had received the word of God (11:1).
- 6) Trace the ways God prepared Peter for the outcome of his visit to Cornelius between Acts 9:32 and 10:48. 1) Peter had been staying with Simon the tanner (9:43), and due to the nature of a tanner's work with dead animals, Peter was likely to have been ceremonially unclean during a good bit of his stay. 2) The miracles of 9:32-43 affirmed the Lord's ongoing work through Peter. 3) Peter seemed mystified by the vision he received from the Lord (10:17, 19-20). However, by the time of his arrival at the home of Cornelius, he was, at the very least, aware that the vision was related to his entrance into a Gentile home (10:28-29). 4) The Gentiles received the Holy Spirit as Peter spoke (verses 44-46), indicating their acceptance by God into His household. At this point, Peter must have realized the greater significance of the vision: it wasn't only about his entrance into a Gentile home but about God's inclusion of the Gentiles into His family! The vision and the sign of tongues gave Peter confidence that Cornelius' household was worthy of believer's baptism (10:47-48).
- 7) Can you share a testimony of a time when you became very aware that God had prepared you for some work or event? Personal sharing

Read Acts 10:1-11:1, Ephesians 2:11-22, 3:2-6 and Colossians 1:25-27.

- 8) List at least four evidences from Acts 10:1-48 that Cornelius had been sincerely seeking God before Peter presented the Gospel to him. "He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly" (10:2). The Lord sent an angel to him (10:3). The angel in his vision said his prayers and gifts to the poor had come up as a memorial offering before God (10:4 [implying that his prayers and gifts pleased God]). Cornelius was quick to obey the instructions of the angel (10:7, 33). Cornelius called together his relatives and close friends so they could hear Peter's message (10:24, 27, 33).
- 9) Consider the Ephesians and Colossians verses above (written by Paul, formerly Saul) with Acts 9:15, Romans 9:8, 11:13, Galatians 2:7, and Acts 10:34-35. Explain how Saul's conversion (Acts 9) and the events of Acts 10 showcase God's sovereign development of His Church. Then make a list of at least three ongoing troubles or issues in your life (however small they may be) that you need to consider in light of God's greater and good plan for your life. Acts 9 tells how God called Saul to be the minister to the Gentiles (Galatians 2:7) and Acts 10 tells how God prepared Peter for the inclusion of the Gentiles in the Church (Romans 9:8). Peter and Cornelius received visions about the same time that Saul was being converted. These all illustrated God's sovereign control and perfect timing. Personal sharing

Read Acts 11:1-30.

- 10) According to Acts 11:1-18, Peter was criticized by his fellow apostles.
  - a) How might Peter have responded to the criticism he received in Acts 11:1-18 and how did he actually respond? Peter might have been hurt and defensive when criticized by those he loved. Instead, he presented the facts, explaining them in light of Christ's teachings (verse 16) and God's sovereign plan and purposes (verse 17).

- b) On the basis of what authority did Peter explain the salvation of the Gentiles to his critics? Was it his own authority as an apostle? **Peter did not defensively demand that his critics accept his explanation based on his own authority as an apostle. Instead, he explained that he acted in obedience to a voice from heaven (11:7, 9) and the Holy Spirit (11:12). The resulting salvation of the Gentiles, said Peter, was in harmony with Jesus' teaching (11:16) and occurred by God's ordaining (11:17).**
- c) According to Acts 11:19-30, how did the church in Jerusalem respond to the conversion of Gentiles in Antioch (just a short time after the conversion of Cornelius' household)? **Without concern or criticism. They sent Barnabas to evaluate the situation and to encourage the new Gentile believers (11:23-24).**
- 11) What do you learn about the church at Antioch from Acts 11:19-27? **They were primarily Gentiles (verses 19-21), Barnabas and Saul were their teachers (verses 22, 25), a great number of people were brought to the Lord (verse 24), the disciples were first called "Christians" there (verse 26), and they were generous toward their oppressed Jewish brothers in Judea (verse 30).**
- 12) How did the churches in Judea and Antioch lend one another support? How are you providing tangible support to Christians outside your home church? **The church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to Antioch to teach and encourage them, and the church in Antioch sent a financial gift to those in Judea. Personal sharing**

#### Read Acts 12.

- 13) Which verse in Acts 12 suggests something about Peter's mental state the night before he was to be put on trial? **Acts 12:7 says Peter was asleep (in fact, so deeply that his physical removal from the prison seemed surreal to him [12:9, 11]). Peter must have been at peace.**
- 14) In what two ways did God overturn the plans of Herod, according to Acts 12? **Herod tried to kill Peter but died himself. Herod tried to stop the growth of the Church by arresting and killing its spokesmen (12:1); nevertheless, the word of God continued to increase and spread (12:24).**
- 15) Compare Acts 12:5 with Acts 12:14-15. Is there something you believe you are praying for earnestly yet would actually be surprised if God answered according to what you have asked? **Personal sharing**