

Saul Converted, A Great Miracle, Cornelius, The Gospel Preached to the Gentiles

INTRODUCTION

Acts 8 ended with the persecution on the church by Saul of Tarsus and the Gospel being spread to Samaria and beyond as a result. In **Acts 9**, Saul sought to expand his persecution to Damascus. Damascus, one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world, is about 130 miles north of Jerusalem, and was home to a large population of Jews in the time of Christ. How many Christians were in Damascus at this time is not known but Saul thought it worthwhile to extend the persecution in that direction.

On the road to Damascus Saul saw a bright light and heard a voice. **Acts 9:5** tells us that the voice said, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” and when Saul asked who is speaking, the voice replied in **vss. 5-6**, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do.” Struck blind by the light, Saul was led into Damascus, and spent three days blind, fasting and praying (**Acts 9:8-11**)

In Damascus, the LORD appeared to a man named Ananias, commanding him to go to Saul. **Acts 9:17-19** tells us, “(17) So Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” (18) And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he got up and was baptized; (19) and he took food and was strengthened.” There are three accounts of Saul’s conversion reported in Acts. These are complementary accounts and help us get the full picture (**Acts 9:1-19; 22:3-16; 26:9-20**).

After his conversion, Saul immediately began to preach Christ. This caused the Jews to take issue with him, eventually making him the target of an assassination plot. Saul went to Jerusalem and tried to associate with the disciples, who were understandable reluctant until Barnabas spoke up for him. After a short time, Paul went to Caesarea and then to Tarsus, his home town. Tarsus, in modern day Turkey, was granted the status of being free by Caesar Augustus. A free city could govern itself with its own laws and appoint its own magistrates. More important, those born in a free city were considered citizens of Rome. This will become important to Saul/Paul later in his ministry.

One big result of Saul’s conversion is recorded in **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.”

In **Acts 9:32** the narrative shifts to Peter. Peter traveled to Lydda and healed a man named Aeneas. **Acts 9:35** tells us that “all who lived in Lydia and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.” At the request of some disciples, Peter went to the coastal town of Joppa where he learned that a woman named Tabitha (also called Dorcas) had died. This woman was well spoken of for her deeds of kindness and charity. In an amazing display of the power of God, Peter raised this woman from the dead, resulting in many from that area being saved.

Acts 10 documents the spread of the Gospel to the Gentiles. A Roman Centurion in Caesarea named Cornelius was praying. Through an angel, God answered his prayer and instructed Cornelius to send for Peter. Peter, after a vision, and at the bidding of the Holy Spirit, went to Caesarea and preached the Gospel. Through a miraculous manifestation of the Holy Spirit, God demonstrated to Peter that Gentiles were

Saul Converted, A Great Miracle, Cornelius, The Gospel Preached to the Gentiles

accepted by God to receive salvation. Peter then commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

Peter reported the good news to Jerusalem and a few people began preaching to the Gentiles. When word of the Gentile conversions was made known to the church in Jerusalem, they sent Barnabas to Antioch where a congregation of Gentile converts had been established. He encouraged them and went to Tarsus to find Saul. They returned to Antioch and worked with the church for a year.

Acts 10:26 reveals that the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.

In **Acts 10:27-30** we learn that a great famine was coming. The Christians in Antioch determined to send relief for those in Judea.

QUESTIONS

1. THE CONVERSION OF SAUL (Acts 9:1-31)

- 1.1 Read Acts 22:3-4; 26:9-11; 1 Corinthians 15:9; Galatians 1:13; Philippians 3:6 1 Timothy 1:13. What do these passages, along with Acts 9:1-2 tell us about the kind of man Saul (Paul) was?
- 1.2 Compare Acts 9:3-9 with Acts 22:6-11 and Acts 26:12-19. List 5 things that happened during the conversion of Saul.
 - 1)
 - 2)
 - 3)
 - 4)
 - 5)
- 1.3 Who was Saul persecuting according to Acts 9:2?
- 1.4 Who does Jesus say Saul is persecuting according to Acts 9:4-5?
- 1.5 Does the Bible give any indication that Saul was saved on the road to Damascus, or when he was praying (Acts 9:6-11)?

Saul Converted, A Great Miracle, Cornelius, The Gospel Preached to the Gentiles

- 1.6 What does the Bible say about how and when Saul received forgiveness of sins?
(Refer to Acts 9:10-18; 22:12-16)

- 1.7 Why wouldn't the disciples in Jerusalem associate with Saul, and who helped him?

- 1.8 What happened to the church after Saul was converted?

2. PETER IN LYDDA AND JOPPA (Acts 9:12-43)

- 2.1 Peter performed miracles in Lydda and Joppa. What was the result of each miracle? Give the Bible references.
 - 1)

 - 2)

- 2.2 What was Tabitha (Dorcas) known for?

3. THE CONVERSION OF CORNELIUS (Acts 10:1-11:18)

- 3.1 Who was Cornelius and what kind of man was he?

- 3.2 What can we infer about God listening to the prayers of non-Christians from Acts 10:4; 30-33?

- 3.3 What was God's response to the prayers of Cornelius? (Consider Acts 10:1-5; 30-32; 11:13-14)

- 3.4 What led Peter, in Acts 10:34-35, to believe that God had accepted the Gentiles?

Saul Converted, A Great Miracle, Cornelius, The Gospel Preached to the Gentiles

- 3.5 How did Peter finally KNOW that God had accepted the Gentiles?

- 3.6 What did Peter command in Acts 10:47-48? Why?

- 3.7 Why did the brethren in Jerusalem take issue with Peter?

- 3.8 List three things the conversion of Cornelius has in common with the conversion of Saul.
 - 1)
 - 2)
 - 3)

4. THE GOSPEL SPREADS TO THE GENTILES (Acts 11:19-30)

- 4.1 Barnabas was sent to Antioch by the church in Jerusalem. List two things we know about Barnabas from previous passages in Acts?
 - 1)
 - 2)

- 4.2 What do we learn about Barnabas in Acts 11:22-24?

- 4.3 What new name was given to the converts in Antioch?

- 4.4 What did Agabus the prophet predict in Acts 11:27-28? When did it occur?

- 4.5 What did the Christians in Antioch determine to do in Acts 11:29-30?

- 4.6 What can we learn about congregational cooperation and individual responsibility from Acts 11:27-30?