

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Lesson 9 w/Answers

Acts 9:32 - 11:18

In this lesson, our study in Acts shifts from studying about Saul's conversion to an examination of how the Lord led Peter out of Jerusalem on his first missionary trip. We will also look at one of the most significant passages in Acts - the story of Cornelius. The story begins in the latter half of Chapter 9 and runs through the early portions of Chapter 11. Beginning with Peter's call to visit the home of a tanner, we will look at the growth of the church outside of Jerusalem and see firsthand what life was like some ten years after the resurrection of Christ and the Day of Pentecost.

As I read Acts 9:32 through Acts 11:18 and studied all of the material, I rediscovered a truth that I had originally learned in my hermeneutics class in seminary. That is, that God's word is finite; it is completely contained within the Bible, beginning with Genesis and ending with Revelation. This makes every word, every verse, every chapter and every book extremely important. It also means that, as a body of text, we can make certain distinctions. For example, there must be much to be learned by studying Genesis, because of the amount of God's word contained with it.

In my preparation of this lesson, I discovered that there are approximately 13 verses around the Day of Pentecost, approximately 31 verses around the conversion of Saul, and approximately 66 verses relating to the conversion of Cornelius and his family. God must be telling us that there are more than a few things that we can learn from reading so much about a single event.

And so, with that as a backdrop, let's consider these passages and see what God would have us to learn about His church, His people, and about God Himself.

For our study, read Acts 9:32 - 11:18 and answer the following:

1. In Acts 9:32-35, Peter heals Aeneas, a lame man. There must have been many miracles accomplished by Peter in the eight to ten years following the resurrection of Christ. What might be one reason that this particular miracle is placed here by Luke? (See Acts 9:38)
 - a. ANSWER: Perhaps so that those in Joppa would know of Peter's close proximity, and so that we would understand why they specifically called for Peter.
2. Have you ever heard of a "Dorcas Ministry"? See if you can determine why this ministry would relate to Acts 9:36-43?
 - a. ANSWER 1: Dorcas (aka, Tabitha) cared for the poor, and was a giving and serving person.
 - b. ANSWER 2: She was a model for community-oriented service.
3. What is so unusual about the fact that Peter stayed with Simon the Tanner? (Acts 9:43)
 - a. ANSWER: The Tanner's house would have been unclean to Rabbi's.
4. In Acts 10:1-2, we are introduced to Cornelius. How is he described?
 - a. ANSWER 1: An Italian soldier, and a "devout" a man who "feared God";
 - b. ANSWER 2: A giving man;
 - c. ANSWER 3: A Centurion; he could have been in charge of over 100 men or as many as 600 men, depending on the regiment;
 - d. ANSWER 4: A real pillar of his community.

5. Was Cornelius "saved"?
 - a. ANSWER 1: No. He was a "religious man", not a saved one.
 - b. ANSWER 2: However, he desired to learn more about God and to follow God where God led him.
6. If Cornelius was not saved, then how did he know God? (Romans 1:20-21)
 - a. ANSWER 1: We can see that God exists through His creation.
 - b. ANSWER 2: When we search for God, we will find Him.
7. Did you believe God was real before you were saved? Were you searching when Christ came into your life, just as the Centurion was?
 - a. ANSWER: Yes; indeed, by the time we surrender our hearts to Christ we already know that he is real. And when we come to that realization, our decision to accept or reject him is an eternal one.
8. Similar to what we observed with Saul and Ananias, we see again with Peter and Cornelius. God knows our needs before we ask, and He was already working in Peter's heart to prepare him to meet and witness to Cornelius, even before Cornelius' servants arrived. Look at Peter's vision in verses 9 through 16. What is Peter telling God about what he's being asked to do?
 - a. ANSWER: He cannot eat unclean meat, even though he did stay at the "unclean" home of the Tanner. Eating food that was not kosher was something that he did not want to do, even though he was hungry.
9. Does Peter know that God is sending him to see a Roman soldier, a Centurion, and does he know why God wants him to go there?
 - a. ANSWER: Yes, he knows who he is going to see, but not why.
10. What does Cornelius do in preparation for Peter's visit?
 - a. ANSWER: He invites in his friends, his family and his relatives; he wanted them all to hear what God would have Peter say.
11. How does Cornelius greet Peter, and why? If we accept that Cornelius is not yet a believer, why would he act in this fashion?
 - a. ANSWER: In falling at Peter's feet to worship him, he is essentially mistaking the messenger for the message. However, in doing so, he also recognized that Peter was someone who served God.
12. Can you recall before you were saved? Did you recognize someone who was holy and treat them differently, even though you were not yet a believer, just as Cornelius did?
 - a. ANSWER: Many of us did treat certain individuals deferentially, mistaking religious piety for goodness, or assuming that someone was somehow "religious and deserving of honor". Or perhaps it reflected the self-recognition that we had fallen short of God's glory when he had recognized its presence in others.
13. Acts 10:28 is a profound confession of Peter's and validates what Christ taught people then, and still teaches us today. What does Mark 7:14-23 tell us about clean and unclean, and how we are to discern the difference?
 - a. ANSWER: It is what is in our hearts that makes us clean or unclean, not what we eat or what nationality we are.
14. Acts 10:34-35 represents a major shift in the beliefs of the early Church, and it is one of the foundational theological principles taught us by Christ. What is it, and why was this so profound at that time, especially for Peter?
 - a. ANSWER 1: God sees us all as equals; He is no respecter of persons.
 - b. ANSWER 2: The Gospel is for all who will believe, not simply the Jews. This was a major revelation for Peter, even though he had walked and worked side-by-side with Christ; this was the first that he came to realize its truth.
15. Why would everyone there have believed Peter? What did he tell them about Christ and the events surrounding Him (in Acts 10:39)?
 - a. ANSWER: He told them that he and the other Apostles were eyewitnesses to those events.

16. Who else does Peter tell them witnessed these events? (see Acts 10:41)

- a. ANSWER: There were many other witnesses who ate and drank with the risen Christ. This supported the fact that the Gospel wasn't just some fabrication of the Apostles; many non-Apostles had also witnessed these events.

17. In Acts 10:44-48, God does something wonderful, what is it?

- a. ANSWER: He pours out His Holy Spirit on them while they listened to Peter and the gospel message.

18. When you consider your salvation experience, can you find many similarities with those of Cornelius and his family? Did the Holy Spirit fill your heart while you listened to or read God's Word?

- a. ANSWER: For most of us, the answer to these questions is yes.

19. After studying the conversion of the Eunuch and Cornelius, is it fair to say that before we are baptized with water, we are first baptized with the Holy Spirit?

- a. ANSWER: Yes.

20. In Acts 11:1-3, what was the response from the "circumcision group" when Peter returned to Jerusalem to tell them of the great things that God had done with this family? Why did they respond this way?

- a. ANSWER 1: They were critical of Peter.
- b. ANSWER 2: They wanted to protect the Jewish perspective; they thought that everyone must convert to Judaism before they could become a follower of Christ.

21. What was Peter's response? (see Acts 11:4-18)

- a. ANSWER: Peter explained to them that the Gospel was for all, not just the Jews.

In these passages, we observed that, through Cornelius, God showed Peter, (and us today) that His Grace is for all who believe and not just the Jews or people with specific backgrounds and upbringing. The Church that Christ is building is not a respecter of persons; it is not built on the clean or unclean food that we eat or other Judaic rules, but only on the resurrected Christ and the blood that he shed for us on the cross.

As we work within our local church body, we need to follow Peter's example of being ready at all times to follow God's leading, even when we don't understand it; and even when God seems to be doing something completely different than what we have ever seen before. Following the leadership of the Holy Spirit and trusting completely in Christ, we can reach out to those around us, minister to the needs of people near and far, and accomplish great things in His kingdom – if we will only depend on Him.

Have a blessed week everyone.

Yours in Christ,

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