

ACTS AT A GLANCE
A Thirteen-Lesson Overview of the Book of Acts

Lesson Seven – Chapters 9-12

1. About Saul

1.1. Luke introduces Saul

- a. In Acts 9, the focus began to transition from the apostle Peter to Saul who became the Apostle Paul.
- b. Saul has already been mentioned twice: He guarded the coats of those who stoned Stephen and consented to his death (Acts 7:58, 8:1). Also he *“made havoc of the church”* with his zealous and vicious persecution of Christians (Acts 8:3).
- c. But, in chapter 9, Luke recorded the amazing conversion of Saul

1.2. Saul’s Background – Let us consider what is revealed about the previous life of Saul

- a. As this account starts, he is a *“young man”* (Acts 7:58).
- b. He was *“a Hebrew of Hebrews”* (Phil 3:5) – a real ‘blue blue’ of the Jews. Perhaps his family was wealthy, politically powerful, or well placed socially.
- c. He was born a Roman citizen (Acts 22:28) in the city Tarsus of Cilicia (Acts 22:3).
- d. As a youth, he moved to Jerusalem and was raised there (Acts 26:4).
- e. He was a student of Gamaliel, a highly respected teacher, a Pharisee, and a member of the powerful Sanhedrin (Acts 5:34, 22:1). It would be expected then, that he would be highly knowledgeable of the Old Testament and completely steeped in the related Jewish misconceptions (and especially those of the Pharisees).
- f. His fellow Pharisees rewarded Saul for his religious fervor with recognition. He told the Galatians, *“I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation”* (Gal 1:14).
- g. Saul always did what he thought was right and tried to live consistent with his understanding of God’s will – even though in error. He said to the Sanhedrin, *“I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day”* (Acts 23:1). He told the Philippians that *“concerning the righteousness which is in the law”* he was *“blameless”* (Phil 3:6).
- h. And whatever he did, he did it with great energy and zeal (Phil 3:5). He was no half-hearted Pharisee and certainly no slacker. When he became convinced that something should be done, he did it with enthusiasm.
- i. And this included his persecution of Christians. He was convinced that Jesus was a blasphemous impostor and that Christians were enemies of God – and he acted

consistently with that belief. These two passages show the depth of his conviction to destroy Christianity:

- *“I ... was zealous toward God as you all are today. I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women, as also the high priest bears me witness, and all the council of the elders, from whom I also received letters to the brethren, and went to Damascus to bring in chains even those who were there to Jerusalem to be punished” (Acts 22:1-5).*
- *“Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities” (Acts 26:4-5).*
- *“For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it” (Gal 1:13).*

2. The Lord Appears to Saul (Acts 9:1-9; also Acts 22:6-11 and 26:12-18)

- 2.1. One of the persecution trips did not work out as Saul had planned. Saul had heard that there were Christians at Damascus (and there were – Acts 9:19). He was determined to root them out and bring them back to Jerusalem for punishment. So he obtained the appropriate paperwork from the High Priest, assembled an appropriate entourage of soldiers and servants, and headed down the mountains toward Damascus (Acts 9:1-2).
- 2.2. One day about noon, as he and his company approached Damascus, a strange thing happened. A light that was brighter than the noonday sun shown down on them – like the glory of God – and Saul was blinded. At the same time, there was a loud noise and Saul, but not the others heard in that noise a voice speaking to him. It was terrifying and both he and his companions fell to the ground.
- 2.3. Then Saul heard a voice speaking to him in the Hebrew language,
 - a. JESUS – *“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”*
 - b. SAUL – *“And Saul said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’”* The use of the term *“Lord”* does not indicate that Saul attributed this phenomenon to deity. It was instead a term of respect for the mighty one causing this strange event.
 - c. JESUS – *“Then the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’”*
 - d. SAUL – *“So he, trembling and astonished, said, ‘Lord, what do You want me to do?’”* Certainly his surprise would be practically immeasurable! The One he thought to be dead was alive! And if He caused this event, He was certainly more than an imposter!

- e. JESUS – *“Then the Lord said to him, ‘Arise and stand on your feet; and go into the city Damascus, and you will be told what you must do.’”* This sequence of events reminds us that men are not saved by sighs, wonders, or visions. Instead, they are saved by doing what God says we *“must do.”*
- f. JESUS – *“For I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, ‘to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.’”* The Lord had a purpose for Saul – even the one who described himself as *“chief”* among sinners (1 Tim 1:15). To us he might have appeared absolutely unusable in the God’s service but that would have been wrong. Paul later told King Agrippa, *“I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision”* (Acts 26:19). What a testimony this is to the grace, mercy, and wisdom of God!

2.4. Note that Paul could not have been a witness for the Lord (as he was – Acts 22:15) unless he had seen Him after His resurrection. Also seeing the resurrected Christ was one of the qualifications for being an apostle. Paul asked the Corinthians, *“Am I not an apostle? ... Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?”* (1 Cor 9:1; also see Acts 1:22).

2.5. Those who then helped him up and led him into the city of Damascus to the house of one named Judas who lived on Straight Street (Acts 9:8, 11). Saul spent the next three days there fasting and praying (Acts 9:9, 11). As this story continues, note that, just as Saul was not saved by a heavenly vision, neither is he saved by his prayer and fasting.

3. Ananias Comes to Saul (Acts 9:10-19)

3.1. Nothing more is known about Ananias other than that he was Christian in Damascus and that he was chosen by the Lord as the one to ‘tell Saul what he must do.’

3.2. The Lord instructed Ananias to go and minister to Saul.

- a. Ananias protested that Saul was a known persecutor who had done much harm to the church at Jerusalem (Acts 9:13-14). Ananias’ apprehension about this assignment was understandable because Saul’s reputation had preceded him. As a matter of fact, his specific purpose for coming to Damascus was generally known.
- b. Isn’t it strange that Ananias felt the need to brief the Lord on Saul’s activities? He seemed to lack faith that he could safely accomplish what the Lord wanted him to do. Remember that Paul later said, *“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”* (Phil 4:13).
- c. But the Lord said, *“Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake”* (Acts 22:15). So, in spite of his fear, Ananias obeyed the command of God and went to Saul.

- d. Ananias accomplished three purposes when he came to Saul:
- He healed his blindness (Acts 9:18-19)
 - He laid hands on him and Saul was filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:17)
 - He was taught what the Lord wanted him to do. First he told Saul about his mission to preach to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15). Then He said, “Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). So baptism, and not visions, prayer, or fasting, was the way to obtain salvation.
- e. *“Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized”* (Acts 9:18).
- f. Before we leave this context, let us consider further verse 17: *“And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’”* What does this mean? Did Ananias give Saul miraculous Holy Spirit gifts by laying his hands on him? To come to understand a difficult passage, we should start with related passages that are clearer to us.
- There is no doubt that gifts of the Holy Spirit were conveyed by the laying on of an apostle’s hands (Acts 8:14-18; 19:6). Ananias, of course, was not an apostle.
 - Jesus Himself conveyed the Holy Spirit on His apostles – directly, and not through any human mediator (Mark 1:8; Acts 2:33). In his epistle to the Galatians, Paul emphasized that his gospel was directly from the Lord by inspiration (e.g., Gal 1:11-12, 2:6).
 - Such miraculous inspiration would not have been given to Saul until he was a Christian – and he was not yet a Christian when Ananias laid his hand on him to heal his blindness (Acts 9:17-18). So if Ananias laid hands on Saul to fill him with the Holy Spirit, he would have had to lay hands on him twice.
 - The wording of verse 17 does not require that the healing and the filling with the Spirit happen at the same time. And while it does imply that the filling with the Spirit is, in some way, contingent on the coming of Ananias, it does not necessarily imply that this happened at the hands of Ananias.
 - What it means is this: Saul was a lost man. Hearing and obeying the gospel was the only way to change that and to *“wash away his sins”* (Acts 22:16). To know about God’s conditions for pardon (e.g., baptism), Saul needed a preacher (Rom 10:14-15; 1 Cor 1:21). And Ananias was assigned by the Lord to perform this role for Saul. So with the coming of Ananias came the saving words of the gospel and the revealing of God’s purpose for Saul. When these prerequisites were accomplished (including Saul’s obedience to these

words), he would be filled with the Holy Spirit by the Lord Himself to prepare him for his role as an apostle.

4. Paul Began to Preach (Acts 9:19-31)

- 4.1. After he addressed his urgent spiritual need, Saul addressed his physical needs – “*he received food and was strengthened*” (Acts 9:19). Then he joined himself to the disciples at Damascus for “*some days*” (Acts 9:19).
- 4.2. Preaching at Damascus (Acts 9:20-22)
 - a. Saul had been exceedingly zealous in his religious fervor before his conversion. Now that he knew the truth he was just as motivated (and perhaps more) to serve God. Imagine the regret he must have felt about the wasted years in rebellion to God’s true will, about all those he had converted to a lie, and all those innocent Christians who had been abused and killed.
 - b. As we might expect from one with his character and personality, Saul (later called Paul – Acts 13:9) immediately began his ministry as assigned when he was converted.
 - c. “*Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues*” at Damascus “*that he is the Son of God*” (Acts 9:19-20).
 - d. Those who heard of this were amazed! (Acts 9:21). Saul had come to Damascus to punish the followers of Jesus – one he supposed to be a dead imposter and blasphemer. But now he had joined himself with those disciples of Jesus and was declaring that He was the resurrected Son of God! Probably some thought that this was a trick to identify more ‘heretics’ for persecution. Perhaps others thought he had lost his mind. Over time the amazing truth of his conversion would come to be understood by many.
 - e. Saul quickly grew in his understanding of the truth and in his ability to use it in fighting error (Acts 9:22). He was not like those of Hebrews 5:11-14 or 2 Timothy 3:7 who failed to mature in their knowledge of the truth.
 - f. Saul “*confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ*” (Acts 9:22). How did Paul “*prove*” the truth of the gospel? He used God-given logic, his eyewitness testimony (Acts 22:15), the Old Testament scriptures, (Acts 13:15-41), and confirming miracles (Acts 14:3, 15:12, 19:11).
 - g. Perhaps Paul’s epistle to the Galatians casts additional light on this period (see Gal 1:18-21). It seems that (a) Saul was at Damascus immediately after his conversion, (b) at some point left Damascus and went to Arabia, (c) and then returned to Damascus.
 - h. After “*many days*” (perhaps three years – Gal 1:18) the Jews had all they could take from this ‘traitor’ who was now making “*havoc*” of their interests – especially at Damascus. So they plotted to kill him (Acts 9:23).

- i. They had apparently stationed watchers at the city gates to ensure he did not escape. But when their plot became known, the brethren lowered Saul down the city walls and he escaped safely to Jerusalem (Acts 9:25).

4.3. Preaching at Jerusalem (Acts 9:30)

- a. At he had at Damascus, Saul attempted to join the brethren there. But this time his overture was rebuffed. After all, these brethren in Jerusalem knew as well as anyone the terrible things that Paul had done to Christians in the past. There was not way they could believe that such a one had really been converted to Christ. (Acts 9:26).
- b. But Barnabas, the generous giver of Acts 4:36-37 took Saul and vouched for him with the apostles. After Saul recounted his story, they believed him and accepted him into their fellowship (Acts 9:27-28). The name Barnabas had been assigned by the apostles and meant *“Son of Encouragement”* (Acts 4:36). Clearly this incident indicates that he was well named.
- c. Then Saul *“spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, but they attempted to kill him”* (Acts 9:29). If Gal 1:18 refers to this time frame, then Saul was in Jerusalem only 15 days.
- d. When this plot was known, the brethren took Saul to the seaport of Caesarea where he caught a ship to Tarsus, his hometown (Acts 9:30).

4.4. Paul goes home to Tarsus (Acts 9:30)

- a. Luke recorded nothing of Saul’s time at Tarsus until Barnabas went to get him to help with the work at Antioch (Acts 11:25-26).
- b. Paul wrote this of that period, *“Afterward I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia ...”* (Gal 1:21).

5. Peace in the Church – *“Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied”* (Acts 9:31).

6. Peter’s Work in the Western Portion of Judea (Acts 9:32-43)

6.1. Peter Heals Aeneas at Lydda (Acts 9:32-35)

- a. Now Luke’s focus turns back to the works of Peter – and stays there all the way until the end of chapter 12. At that point the focus will turn to the evangelism of Saul.
- b. In the last of chapter 9, Luke records Peter’s evangelism in the western portion of Judea at or near Lydda, Sharon, and Joppa.
- c. At Lydda Peter healed a man who had been paralyzed for eight years.
- d. He said, *“Aeneas, Jesus the Christ heals you. Arise and make your bed.”* And that is exactly what Aeneas did (Acts 9:33-34).

- e. This miracle had just the impact that the Lord intended. When the people saw the effect of the miracle they became convinced about the credibility of Peter and his message. So they listened to what he had to say, believed, and obeyed. Or in the simple words of verse 35, *“So all who dwelt at Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.”*

6.2. Peter Raises Dorcas at Joppa (Acts 9:36-43)

- a. At Joppa, a nearby village on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, a well-respected woman had just died. She had been well known for the *“good works and charitable deeds that she did”* (Acts 9:36). Many grieved the death of this good woman.
- b. When the Christians there in Joppa heard that Peter was nearby in Lydda, they send two men for him and urged him *“not to delay”* (Acts 9:38). When he arrived, the brethren immediately took Peter to the room where the body was laid out and where many grievers were assembled (Acts 9:39).
- c. After Peter had expelled everyone from the room, he knelt down and prayed. At his call *“she opened her eyes and sat up”* (Acts 9:40).
- d. *“And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord. So it was that he stayed many days in Joppa ...”* Acts 9:42-43).
- e. One more time: Those in Lydda and Sharon were not converted by the miracle they saw nor did those at Joppa ‘believe’ in just a miracle. The miracles served to get their attention and to entice them to listen. They persuaded them that the gospel was valid and worth considering. These people believed in the gospel and they were converted by the gospel. They then obeyed the gospel.

7. **The Conversion of Cornelius (Acts 10:1-48)**

7.1. Introduction

- a. To this point the gospel had only been preached to Jews and Jewish proselytes.
- b. This was not because the Lord willed Gentiles to be excluded.
 - It had long been prophecies that Gentiles as well as Jews would have a place in the kingdom. For example: *“... As it is written: ‘For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles, and sing to Your name’ ... And again, Isaiah says: ‘There shall be a root of Jesse; And He who shall rise to reign over the Gentiles, In Him the Gentiles shall hope’”* (Rom 15:9, 12).
 - Also, remember the Lord's final commission to His apostles, *““All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations”* (Matt 28:19).

- c. Instead, it was because the Lord wanted the gospel to first be preached to the Jew and then to the Gentiles. To this end, Paul uses the phrase *“the Jew first and also for the Greek”* several times. (Rom 1:16, 2:9-10).
- d. Also, early on, there was reluctance on the part of most Jews – even Christians, to see Gentiles as suitable subjects for the kingdom. This was based on generations of seeing themselves as, not only God chosen people, but also His only people. The times had changed. God’s people were those who came to Him in obedient faith and not those of a specific nation. But long-held beliefs are hard to change.

7.2. Cornelius Calls for Peter (Acts 10:1-8)

- a. There was in the important seaport city of Caesarea a Roman military officer named Cornelius. Here is what is revealed in the scriptures about him:
 - He was officer in command of 100 men in the Italian Regiment (Acts 10:1).
 - He was a *“devout man who feared God with all his household”* (Acts 10:2).
 - He actively practiced his religion by helping the poor and by *“praying to God always”* (Acts 10:3).
 - He was a Gentile and was not a proselyte to the Jewish religion (Acts 10:45).
 - In spite of his religiousness, he was a lost man (Acts 11:13-14).
- b. About 3 o’clock one afternoon as Cornelius prayed he saw a vision in which an angel told him that his attempts at godliness had been noted. But all that was apparently not enough; for the Lord commanded Cornelius to send for Peter who *“will tell you what you must do”* (Acts 10:4-6).
- c. As soon as the angel left Cornelius call two servants and a trusted soldier in his command and sent them to get Peter (Acts 10:7-8).

7.3. Peter’s Vision (Acts 10:9-22)

- a. About noon the next day, Peter went onto the housetop to pray. (Acts 10:9-10). While there he became very hungry.
- b. While there, he also saw a vision. In this vision he saw a container *“like a great sheet bound at the corners”* being let down from heaven to earth to where he was. It contained all manner of animals – both those classified as ‘clean’ and ‘unclean’ under Old Testament rules. He was invited by a voice to, *“Rise, Peter; kill and eat”* (Acts 10:13).
- c. Peter would have been shocked and indignant about such a thought. To a Jew, the thought of eating pigs or other unclean animals would have been sickening. They would see such a thing as a blatant violation of God’s laws. So Peter responded, *“Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean”* (Acts 10:14).
- d. The voice answered, *“What God has cleansed you must not call common”* (Acts 10:15).

- e. This sequence was repeated three times with no additional explanation as to what the vision meant. It left Peter puzzled as to what it was all about (Acts 10:17, 19).
- f. As he pondered this matter, the three men sent from Cornelius arrived at his gate. Peter's normal inclination might have been to 'shoo' these Gentiles without considering their request. But the Lord intervened and said through His Spirit, *"Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them"* (Acts 10:20).
- g. Peter's subsequent actions must have shocking to Simon the tanner, his host, and to other Jews. He invited these Gentiles into the house, provided lodging for them, and then went with them back to Caesarea the next morning (Acts 10:23).
- h. While Peter did not yet fully understand God's purpose in all this, he did understand that something strange and important was happening. So wisely, he took six witnesses with him from among the Christians at Joppa (Acts 10:2, 11:12).

7.4. Peter Comes to Cornelius' House (Acts 10:24-33)

- a. The next day they reached Caesarea and entered the home of Cornelius. Several things about this meeting are interesting.
 - Cornelius demonstrated how seriously he took this matter by (a) coming out to meet Peter and by (b) having assembled his relatives and close friends (Acts 10:24-25). He really wanted to know what he *"must do"* (Acts 10:6).
 - He also demonstrated a lack of spiritual insight in that he attempted to worship Peter and had to be restrained (Acts 10:25-26).
- b. Peter first explained why he came *"without objection"* to the home of a Gentile in spite of his previous understanding that it was *"unlawful"* (Acts 10:29). He has apparently come to understand the meaning of the vision. He said, *"You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean"* (Acts 10:28).
- c. Cornelius then filled Peter in on his vision the reason for his appeal to Peter. He said that God had instructed him to send for Peter, *"who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved"* (Acts 11:14). He indicated his sober determination to please God by saying, *"Now therefore, we are all present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God"* (Acts 10:33).

7.5. Peter Preaches to Cornelius and His Household (Acts 10:34-43) – *“Then Peter opened his mouth and said ...”*

- a. ‘Now I understand that God is not partial to any particular race, nation, or people’ *“but in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him”* (Acts 10:34-35)
- b. *“You know”* about Jesus – about His teaching, His miracles, and His death. *“And,”* Peter added, *“we are witnesses of the things which He did...”* (Acts 10:36-39).
- c. This same Jesus God raised from the dead. Of this Peter says that he and others are witnesses. In fact, he and other disciples actually ate and drank with the resurrected Christ. (Acts 10:40-41).
- d. And God *“commanded us to preach to the people”* about this Jesus (Acts 10:42).
 - That, at the end of time, He will be the judge of all men (Acts 10:42).
 - And that, just as written aforetime by Old Testament prophets, *“whoever believe in Him will receive remission of sins”* (Acts 10:41).
 - (Note that other passages speak of “remission of sins” and make it also contingent on (a) the sacrificial blood of Jesus – Matt 26:28, (b) repentance – Luke 3:3; Acts 2:38), and (c) baptism – Acts 2:38. And Cornelius and his household later repented (Acts 11:18) and was baptized (Acts 10:48) so that they could gain access to the saving blood of Jesus.)

7.6. Cornelius and His Household are Converted (Acts 10:44-48)

- a. While Peter was still preaching to them, *“the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word”* and they began to *“speak with tongues and magnify God”* (Acts 10:45-46). Peter later recounted that *“This was just like upon us at the beginning”* (Acts 11:15).
 - What happened? These Gentiles started speaking in foreign languages that they did not previously know. Such a miracle indicated that this episode had the approval of God. Or more specifically, that God approved the acceptance of Gentiles into His kingdom.
 - Who gave the Gentiles this power? Peter? No. It was a direct operation of God (Acts 11:16-17).
 - Why was it like what happened *“at the beginning – i.e., at Pentecost?”* (a) It was administered by Jesus and not man, (b) it involved speaking in tongues, (c) it was called a *“baptism with the Holy Spirit”* (Acts 11:16).
 - What was the purpose of this miraculous event? To persuade Jewish Christians that *“God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life”* (Acts 11:18).

- b. In response to this miracle, Peter and those Jews with him were astonished!" (Acts 10:45). There was no confusion about what had just happened. That was amazing enough. But what was more amazing was that it happened to Gentiles!
- c. The implications of God's miraculous intervention were clear. He approved the acceptance of Gentiles. Peter indicated his understanding of this truth by saying, *"Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?"* (Acts 10:47).
- d. *"And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord"* Acts 10:48). Why? Because this was part of the *"things commanded by God"* (Acts 10:33) *"by which"* [Cornelius and his household could] *"be saved"* (Acts 11:14).
- e. Then Cornelius, the first Gentile Christian, asked Peter to stay a few days with him there in Caesarea (Acts 10:48).

8. Paul Defends His Ministry to the Gentiles (Acts 11-1-18)

- 8.1. Words of these amazing events came to the brethren at Jerusalem and not all were pleased by this news. They had the same prejudices that other Jews had about the Gentiles. Had Peter gone crazy? It was certainly a good thing that he had the six Jewish witnesses of what happened at Caesarea (Acts 11:1). When Peter came up to Jerusalem to report on the matter the rebuke of some was quick and harsh as they said, *"You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!"*
- 8.2. Then Peter began at the beginning and explained to them exactly what happened (Acts 11:4-15). His conclusions were forceful and persuasive.
 - a. *"The Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning"* – i.e., at Pentecost (Acts 11:15).
 - b. Peter immediately associated this with the baptism of the Holy Spirit which Jesus Himself promised to give and that the apostles had received (Acts 11:16).
 - c. Peter then concluded, *"If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?"* In that God gave to Gentiles what He had given to the Jews He was demonstrating His impartiality and His acceptance of the Gentiles. To stand in the way of the conversion of these Gentiles would be to resist the clear will of God.
- 8.3. Paul's argument was convincing. To their credit, these Jewish Christians allowed their prejudices to be replaced with the truth. Oh that all could be that open minded when faced with the correction of closely held error!
- 8.4. *"When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, "Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life"* (Acts 11:18).

9. The Church at Antioch (Acts 11:19-30)

9.1. Planting the Seed (Acts 11:19-21)

- a. Following the murder of Stephen and the vicious attacks by Saul and his companions, many Christians from *Jerusalem* “*were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria*” and “*those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word*” (Acts 8:11, 4). And some of those traveled as far as Antioch and began to preach to the Jews there (Acts 11:19).
- b. But some of them also preached to the Hellenist at Antioch. “*And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord*” (Acts 11:21).
 - Usually the term “Hellenist” refers to Greek-speaking Jews but in this context it may refer to Gentiles. The letter from the church leaders at Jerusalem was addressed to “*the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch*” (Acts 15:23). Also remember the issue with Peter and Barnabas refusing to eat with the Gentile Christians at Antioch when Jewish Christians from Jerusalem were present (Gal 2:11-13).
 - What would motivate these Christians from Cyprus and Cyrene to take such a radical step is unknown. Perhaps they knew of Peter’s experience at Caesarea.

9.2. The Coming of Barnabas (Acts 11:22-24)

- a. When the church at Jerusalem heard about the progress at Antioch, they sent Barnabas to help in the work there. He was pleased by the growth of the church in this area and immediately began to encourage the new Christians to “*continue in the Lord*” (Acts 11:22-23). Such encouragement should not be surprising from one whose very name means “*Son of Encouragement*” (Acts 4:36).
- b. Good success at teaching and preaching is more likely to come from one who ‘walks the talk’. And Barnabas certainly did that. In chapter four we read of his generosity to the needy. Now Luke tells us that, “*He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith*” (Acts 11:24). In this context, “*full of the Holy Spirit*” probably refers to being full of the Spirit-given Word as opposed to miraculous gifts (see similar usage in Acts 6:3).

9.3. Saul Preaches at Antioch (Acts 11:25-26)

- a. “*Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch*” (Acts 11:25).
- b. Was this just because more help was needed? Or was it because this was the first church with a large number of Gentile converts and Saul was ordained by the Lord to work with the Gentiles (Acts 9:15)?
- c. In any case, Saul agreed to come and stayed about a year. He and Barnabas worked together there and they “*taught many people*” (Acts 11:26).

d. *“And the disciples were first called Christians at Antioch”* (Acts 11:26).

9.4. A Famine is Prophesied (Acts 11:27-30)

- a. There were *“a diversity of gifts”* and *“ministries ... but one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills”* (1 Cor 12:4–5, 11). And one of those gifts was the ability to foretell the future 1 Cor 12:28-29; Acts 11:27).
- b. As Saul and Barnabas worked with the brethren at Antioch, prophets came down from Jerusalem (Acts 11:27). It is fair to assume that they were Christians and were part of the church in Jerusalem. How did they get to be prophets? Through the laying on of the hands of an apostle (Acts 8:17-18).
- c. One of those prophets, Agabus, foretold a great worldwide famine that was to occur during the reign of Claudius Caesar – 41-54 AD (Acts 11:28). We will meet Agabus again later in our study as he delivers another prophecy of bad news (Acts 21:10-11).
- d. The brethren in Antioch apparently understood the challenge to be worse in Judea than where they were in the region of Syria. So they determined *“to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea”* with each contributing *“according to his ability”* (Acts 11:29). Notice that the relief is *“for the brethren”* and not for all the other hundreds of thousands who were hungry. As such, this is not an example of ‘general benevolence.’ Such a concept, while heavily embedded in today’s social gospel, was not practiced in New Testament churches.
- e. The money was collected and sent to the elders at Jerusalem by the hands of Barnabas and Saul. Nothing is mentioned in Acts about this trip. Luke next turned back to focus on Barnabas and Saul when *“they had finished their ministry”* in Jerusalem and were ready to return to Antioch (Acts 12:23).

10. Peter is Imprisoned by Herod (Acts 12:1-11)

10.1. Peter’s arrest and imprisonment (Acts 12:1-5)

- a. *“Now about that time”* Herod Agrippa (A.D. 37-49) began to persecute Christians and killed the apostle James (Acts 12:1-2).
- b. This act pleased the Jews – especially the Jewish leaders and happy subjects were good news for a ruler like Herod. Unrest among his subjects would bring quick disapproval from Rome. So to further please the Jews he had Peter arrested.
- c. Peter was arrested during the Passover Feast days, put into a most secure part of the prison in Jerusalem, and guarded by a contingent of 16 Roman soldiers. He was chained between two of the soldiers with two other guard posts between him and freedom (Acts 12:3-4, 6, 10).
- d. During this time, *“Constant prayer was offered for him by the church”* (Acts 12:5).

10.2. Peter's Miraculous Release from Prison (Acts 12:7-11)

- a. The night before Herod planned to bring Peter out and kill him, the Lord intervened in a miraculous way and delivered him from his Roman captors.
- b. An angel of the Lord appeared to Peter, unbound his chains, and led him through locked doors and guard posts out of the prison. At first Peter thought he was dreaming but when safely on the city streets outside the prison, he knew the truth (Acts 12:7-11). He said, *"Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent His angel, and has delivered me from the hand of Herod and from all the expectation of the Jewish people"* (Acts 12:15).

10.3. Peter Goes to the Home of Mary , the Mother of John Mark (Acts 12:12-18)

- a. Then late at night, Peter *"came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying"* (Acts 12:12). Remember John Mark, first introduced in this passage. Luke will reintroduce him a little later.
- b. In spite of their constant prayers for Peter's well being, his friends were amazed at his release (Acts 12:13-16).
- c. Peter explained what had happened to them and instructed them to brief James and the brethren (Acts 12:17).
- d. He then left and went to another place (Acts 12:17). Perhaps he believed that the Romans would look for him at Mary's house.
- e. You can imagine the consternation among the guards when they awoke and their prisoner was gone! After a fruitless search for Peter, Herod ordered that all his guards be executed (Acts 12:18-19).

11. **The Death of Herod Agrippa (Acts 12:20-25)**

- 11.1. Following this debacle, Herod left Jerusalem and went down to Caesarea and stayed there (Acts 12:19).
- 11.2. In A.D. 44, he appeared before a crowd in his finery and addressed them. In response they began to chant, *"The voice of a god and not of a man!"* (Acts 12:23).
- 11.3. In his vanity and love of the praise of men, Herod gladly accepted this worship without protest. *"Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died"* (Acts 12:23).
- 11.4. The Roman historian Josephus recorded this event in the following words: *"On the second day of the festival, Herod put on a garment made wholly of silver, and of a truly wonderful contexture, and came into the theater early in the morning; at which time the silver of his garment was illuminated by the fresh reflection of the sun's rays upon it. ... At that moment, his flatterers cried out . . . that he was a god. ... Upon this the king did neither rebuke them, nor reject their impious flattery ... A severe pain also arose in his belly, and began in a most violent manner ... his pain was become violent.*

Accordingly he was carried into the palace ... And when he had been quite worn out by the pain in his belly for five days, he departed this life, being in the fifty-fourth year of his age, and in the seventh year of his reign." (Flavius Josephus, Jewish Antiquities 19.343-350).

12. Growth of the Church (Acts 12:24-25)

12.1. Herod, the enemy of the church died a painful death "but the word of God grew and multiplied" (Acts 12:24).

12.2. Chapter 12 appears almost as a parenthetical insert between Acts 11:30 and Acts 12:25.

- a. In the last of chapter 11 Luke tells of a collection made in Antioch for the needy Christians in Judea. Barnabas and Saul were sent to deliver this collection to the elders at Jerusalem (Acts 11:30).
- b. Now at the end of chapter 12, Luke returns to this account. He records that Barnabas and Saul "*fulfilled their ministry*" – that is, they delivered the collection to the Jerusalem elders just as they planned (verse 25).
- c. Then they returned to Antioch and took with them John Mark, the son of Mary.
- d. We do not know whether Barnabas and Saul were in Jerusalem at the time of Peter's imprisonment or if they were praying with the others in Mary's house. They may have been in Mary's house at some point because they met her son, John Mark, and grew to respect his abilities and/or character.

ACTS AT A GLANCE
A Thirteen-Lesson Overview of the Book of Acts

Questions on Lesson Seven – Chapters 9-12
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1. Answer the following multiple choice questions about Paul:
 - 1.1. Paul was born in (a) Caesarea, (b) Damascus, or (c) Tarsus?
 - 1.2. He grew up in (a) Tarsus, (b) Jerusalem, or (c) Rome?
 - 1.3. Paul was a (b) proselyte, (b) Jew, or (c) a devout Gentiles?
 - 1.4. Paul became a Roman citizen by (a) payment of the required fee, (c) proclamation of the Roman senate, or (c) by birth?
 - 1.5. At the time of our study, Paul is (a) a young man, (b) a mature man, or (c) aged?
 - 1.6. Paul was a (a) Pharisee, (b) Epicurean, (c) Stoic, or (d) Sadducee?
 - 1.7. Paul's teacher was Simon of Timor, (b) Caiaphas, or Gamaliel?
 - 1.8. Which of the following apply to Paul as chapter 9 starts: (a) Energetic, (b) Timid, (c) Reluctant, (d) Conscientious, or (e) Remorseful?

2. Why was Paul going to Damascus? _____.
Whose idea was this? (Acts 9:1-2) _____. How far was Paul willing to go in his persecution of Christians? (Acts 26:4-5) _____.

3. What did Paul see on the road to Damascus? (Acts 9:3, 22:14) _____
_____.

4. What, in general, did Paul hear on the road to Damascus? _____.
What did his traveling companions hear? _____.
(Use these answers to reconcile the meanings of Acts 9:7 and 22:9).

5. Why was Paul astonished when the voice said, *"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting?"*
_____.

6. Why did Paul ask, *"Lord, what do you want me to do?"* and what did he mean by this question? _____
_____.

7. Was Paul saved by this amazing religious experience? _____. What did Paul do when he was led into Damascus? (Acts 9:11) _____. Did these pious actions save him? _____. Use the scriptures to prove your answer. _____
8. What was Ananias' reservation about going to Paul? (Acts 9:13-14) _____
9. For what purpose had the Lord chosen Paul? (Acts 9:15) _____
10. For what purposes was Ananias sent to Paul? (a) Acts 9:6 _____
 (b) Acts 9:17 _____ (c) Acts 9:17 _____
11. What did Paul do as soon as he could see? (Acts 9:18) _____
 Why? (Acts 9:6, 22:16) _____
12. Paul spend some days with _____ and immediately he did what? (Acts 9:19-20) _____
13. What caused Paul to leave? _____. Where did he go? _____
 What difficulty did he encounter there? _____
 Who helped him and how? (Acts 9:26-27) _____
14. There Paul spoke _____ (v29) and the Hellenist reacted how? (v29) _____
15. Paul was then sent to _____ (v30) where he remained until when? (Acts 11:25-26) _____
16. What two wonderful things happened in Lydda? (Acts 9:32-35) _____
17. Dorcas was full of _____ (Acts 9:36). What was the result of her resurrection? (Acts 9:42). _____
18. Cornelius was:
- 18.1. From (a) Antioch, (b) Caesarea, or (c) Damascus?
- 18.2. He was a (a) Soldier, (b) Priest, or (c) Leader of the synagogue?
- 18.3. He was a (a) Jew, (b) Proselyte, or (c) Gentile?

19. Cornelius was a _____ man who _____ the Lord, gave _____, and _____ always (Acts 10:2-NKJV). Was he a saved man? _____. Prove your answer (hint: See Acts 11:14) _____.
20. How did God intervene in the conversion of Cornelius? _____
 _____.
 What did the Lord not do for Cornelius? _____.
 Compare with the conversion of Paul – what did the Lord do to aid his conversions and what did He not do? _____.
 (So even in these very special conversions, there were no waivers, shortcuts or partiality.)
21. Whom does God accept? (Acts 10:35) _____.
22. Did Cornelius know anything about the truth before Peter came? (Acts 10:37) _____.
 Peter preached the _____ of Jesus (v38), his _____ (v39), and His _____ (v40).
23. What was Cornelius' first obligation in response to Peter's preaching? (v43) _____.
 What else was he commanded to do? (v48) _____.
24. The Holy Spirit fell upon Cornelius and his household for what purpose? (Acts 11:17-18)
 _____.
25. In what way was this event like what happened at Pentecost? _____
 _____.
 How is it different from what happened in Acts 8:15-17? _____.
26. What was the complaint of some Jewish Christian against Peter? (Acts 11:3)
 _____.
27. When Peter explained what happened, how did they react? (Acts 11:18) _____
 _____.
28. In response to growth of the church at Antioch, _____ (v22) was sent. What did he do for them? (v23) _____. He then left Antioch to go to _____ and to seek _____ (v25).
29. The disciples were first called _____ at Antioch (Acts 11:26).

30. What prophecy caused the brethren at Antioch to raise a collection? (Acts 11:28-29)

_____.

30.1. Each contributed according to _____ (v29)

30.2. The money was for the support of _____ (v29)

30.3. Who delivered the money? _____ (v30)

30.4. Who received the money? _____ (v30)

31. King _____ killed _____. How did the Jews react? _____.

What did their reaction motivate the king to do _____ (Acts 12:1-3)?

32. Describe the provisions made to make sure Peter did not escape (Acts 12:6, 10) _____

_____.

33. Meanwhile, what were Peter's brethren doing (Acts 12:5, 12)? _____.

34. How did Peter escape? (Acts 12:7-11) _____.

Where did he then go _____ (Acts 12:12)? Who was at this

house that played a role in later portions of this book? _____.

35. What happened to the soldiers who guarded Peter? (Acts 12:19) _____.

36. Why and how did King Herod die? (Acts 12:20-23) _____

_____.

37. Read Acts 12:25. What "ministry" is being referred to? _____.

Who left Jerusalem with Barnabas and Saul? _____.