

UPON THE ROCK

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THE CONVERSION OF THE JEWS ON PENTECOST

Patrick Morrison

What exactly does it mean to be converted to Christ? Conversion carries with it the idea of change or transformation. In a spiritual sense, conversion to Christ means one changes his allegiance from the carnal, material dominion of Satan to the spiritual kingdom of Christ. How is this conversion accomplished? Instances of so-called “conversion” are frequently heard in our society. One merely has to turn on the television to find any number of people who are more than willing to recount their “conversion experiences.” The vast majority of these “testimonies” of conversion are better felt than told experiences. Many will claim that a mysterious feeling suddenly overwhelmed them, and they then knew they had been saved. Others claim that after praying the sinner’s prayer, they felt the Lord’s presence, indicating that they had been saved. Others claim to have seen signs or visions from the Lord as evidence of their conversions. All of these conversion experiences share a common bond—they are all subjective and mystical in nature. This is not at all how the Bible portrays conversion to Christ. The Biblical accounts of conversion are based upon an objective standard of truth, which, once complied with, ensures one’s conversion to the Lord.

Some will argue that those who were converted in the Bible were told different things in order to be saved. For instance, Paul was simply told to arise and be baptized to have his sins washed away (Acts 22:16), but the Philippian jailer was told to believe on the Lord in order to be saved (Acts 16:31). Why were they told two different

things in order to reach the same goal? To better understand the accounts of conversion in the book of Acts, think of conversion as a journey. On this journey to find salvation, there is only one road (John 14:6; Matthew 7:13,14), and one roadmap (the Bible). Along this path, there are markers to indicate one's progress toward his destination of salvation. Suppose that there were five markers along this road, and that one traveler had already passed two of them, while another had not yet begun his journey. Should they stop and ask someone what was required of them to complete their journeys, one would be told he had only to pass three more markers, while the other would need to pass all five. So it is with the accounts of conversion in the book of Acts. Some already believed in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, while others had not yet come to that point. Some had already indicated their repentance, while others had not. What initially looks like differing standards of conversion are really one objective standard.

The conversion of some 3,000 Jews on the day of Pentecost in AD 29 marked the beginning of the Lord's church as an accomplished reality. Before His death, Christ told Peter that He would give unto him the keys of the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 16:19). Peter and the other apostles used these keys on the day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2. Peter on that day marks the first recorded gospel sermon with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as an accomplished fact. Many of the Jews who had convened in Jerusalem from all parts of the Roman Empire to celebrate Pentecost knew about the crucifixion of Christ upon the cross, and many of them had been directly involved in putting Jesus to death. The Jewish concept of the Messiah led them to consider Jesus an impostor. They did not want to think He was truly the Son of God. Peter's point preached provided ample evidence that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the only begotten of the Father, showing both from the Old Testament scriptures and the life and work of Jesus so that there could be no misunderstanding. As Peter came to the conclusion of his great sermon, he rebuked those guilty of the blood of the Lord (Acts 2:36). Many of the Jews gathered on this great day now had come to believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. They were convicted of their sins, particularly of being guilty of crucifying the Son of God. This guilt and shame weighed heavily upon those who had come to believe, and they wanted the burden of their sins to be lifted. Belief only was not

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Upon The Rock
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GOD'S RIGHTEOUS ACT— OUR ONLY HOPE

While on earth, Jesus declared Himself “The Way, the Truth and the Life” (John 14:6). He exclusively offers justification. When Paul looked back on the historical fact of the resurrection of Christ he did so with full access to all the testimony that firsthand eyewitnesses had to offer. He concluded that Jesus was and is the only hope of eternity! He was so convinced of this fact that he turned his back on his previous religion and embraced the doctrine of Christ. Furthermore, he wrote in terms that unmistakably declare Jesus as the exclusive hope of mankind. God’s righteous act at Calvary is our one and only hope!

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UPON THE ROCK is published monthly for the purpose of setting forth sound biblical material concerning first principles and evangelism. We strive to print articles that are informative for Christians and non-Christians.

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enough to wash away their sins. Notice what they asked Peter and the rest of the apostles: “Men and brethren, what shall we do” (Acts 2:37)? If faith only were enough to obtain forgiveness of sins, then surely Peter would have let them know that they were now forgiven, that the burden of their sins had been lifted. Is that what Peter told them to do? One need only read the next verse to discover there was still something these sinners had to do to be forgiven. Upon their belief in Jesus as the Son of God, Peter then told them to “repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (2:38). When one comes to believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that he died for the sins of the world upon the cross, and that by virtue of one’s sins he is in need of salvation through the sacrifice of Christ, the next logical step would be repentance. Repentance comes about as a result of godly sorrow (2 Corinthians 7:10). When one sees sin as God sees it, he then must make the decision within himself to quit sinning and start serving the Lord. The Jews gathered on the day of Pentecost had to make that decision to get out of service to Satan, and give their lives and wills over to the will of the Lord.

There was still something else that those on Pentecost had to do to obtain the forgiveness of their sins. They still had to be baptized to have remission of sins. The Bible is clear that baptism is essential for salvation, no matter what men may say. Many cry long and hard in an attempt to alter God’s divine plan of salvation, but the honest Bible student will realize that baptism is a necessary part of man’s journey toward his destination of salvation. Peter would later write that “baptism doth also now save us” (1 Peter 3:21). How much clearer could it be? If that is not enough, consider the words of the Savior: “he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:16). Many may disagree with the Bible and baptism all he wants, but that still does not change divine truth! Those on Pentecost were commanded to be baptized if they desired remission of sins. The same holds true for anyone today who has come to believe on Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and who is willing to repent of his sins. Those who were willing to accept this message were then baptized into Christ (Acts 2:41), and added to the Lord’s church (2:47). This is how some 3,000 Jews on the day of Pentecost were converted! Every account of conversion in the book of Acts shares a common bond. Every person who was convicted of his sins by the preaching of

the gospel (Acts 2:37), who came to believe that Jesus is the Son of God (16:31), repented of his sins (Acts 2:38), made a public confession of his faith in Christ (8:37), every case of conversion culminated in the subject being baptized into Christ (2:38; 8:12; 8:38; 10:48; 16:15; 16:33; 18:8; 22:16).

All of these accounts of conversion are examples for us and how we are converted to Christ today. Have you been converted to the Lord? Are you a Christian? Have you done what those in the book of Acts did to be saved? If not, then follow the simple, saving plan of salvation that we have studied.

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LESSONS FROM PHILIP AND THE EUNUCH

Cliff Goodwin

It is the author's opinion that one of the fullest chapters in the historical book of Acts is chapter eight. This great chapter records the earliest spread of the gospel beyond Jewry as the Jerusalem church was persecuted and her disciples were scattered abroad (Acts 8:1-4). The vast majority of this chapter deals with the evangelistic work of one Philip—from his labors in the city of Samaria to his one-on-one study with the Ethiopian eunuch on the Gaza road. Acts 8 truly reveals Philip the evangelist as being one of the great servants of God in the early church, and many lessons may be gleaned from the events surrounding his encounter with the eunuch.

The eunuch was returning to Ethiopia after having been to Jerusalem for the purpose of worshipping (Acts 8:27). He was obviously a proselyte and a studious one at that for while riding back to his homeland he sat and read from the book of Isaiah (Acts 8:28,32- 33). At the Spirit's bidding, Philip ran and joined himself to the eunuch's chariot posing this query, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" (Acts 8:30b). To this question the eunuch replies, "How can I, except some man should guide me?" (Acts 8:31a).

would do well to make absolutely sure that the God of heaven has canceled our sin debt! Justification is not a feeling. Justification is not a mystical occurrence that is brought to fruition by hours of seeking God's face or by incessant pleadings for His mercy. Justification results when man accepts the gift on God's terms! Every case of conversion in the book of Acts contemplated justification and every one of them required man to act out of faith in God's offer of justification. Throughout the book of Acts, the book of conversions, seekers were justified when they accepted God's offer by being penitently baptized into Jesus Christ (cf. Acts 2:38; 22:16).

Since justification is achieved through faith, it follows that all human schemes and declarations of justification are worthless! The offer of God cannot be matched by human agencies. Businesses frequently offer to accept coupons of competitors and match prices on like items. Human religions are similar to the matching coupon offers in the business world. They offer to match but there is one huge catch - God has no competitors! He is the only One in the soul-saving business! The promises of men cannot be redeemed in Heaven's courts. Justification is far too serious a business to attempt to achieve it in any way other than that which God has revealed in the scriptures. All who would be justified must come to God on His terms.

CONDEMNATION —THE ONLY ALTERNATIVE

"Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation (Romans 5:18). Condemnation is the only alternative to justification. The final destiny of the condemned is too horrid to imagine. It is described in the Bible in terms that make it clearly undesirable and entirely objectionable to mankind. It is a place where "their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:44-48). It is a place of utter darkness and "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Luke 13:28). If there were another alternative, had there been some other way, the Son would not have gone to Calvary as He did. Both friend and foe tried to suggest shortcuts to Jesus, shortcuts to avoid the cross. There simply was no other way. Condemnation is a fate so horrible that Jesus was willing to accept the penalty of death so that we might avoid such an eternal destiny.

Jesus declared, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:45). As He stood before Pilate, the ruler arrogantly asked, “Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You?” (John 19:10). To this Jesus replied, “You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above.” (John 19:11).

John 3:16 is arguably the most readily recognized verse in the Bible. However I would suggest that it is the least understood! Hear its words: “God so loved the world that He gave...” That’s the free gift that Paul contemplated in Romans 5. This verse is the least understood because it contains the most difficult concept that humanity is called upon to believe. While gripped by the throes of death and with throat parched by hours of indescribable suffering, Jesus found the strength of character to utter, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.” (Luke 23:34). No man can comprehend the depth—of love from which such a pronouncement came! This gift this free and matchless gift forms the basis of the gospel system. It is the Good News that excited the disciples 2000 years ago and it is the Good News that still mystifies all who reflect on it today.

THE RESULT — JUSTIFICATION

The free gift results in justification, a technical term that takes into account the justice that Righteous God demands and the inability of sinful man to conform to His demands. Justification implies the unconditional love that John 3:16 declares. The justification of the cross is appropriated through faith (Romans 5:1). The entire process by which God declared the penitent sinner “Not Guilty!” is a process accepted by faith. There is no tangible bill of accusation written against us, yet we know that one exists. There is no invoice that summarizes our debt, but we know that we are hopelessly in debt. There is no legal paper to be stamped, “Paid in Full,” but we are fully persuaded that such a process occurs when the penitent sinner is declared righteous through the blood of Jesus.

Justification is a process that begins and ends in faith. Since the only tangible evidence of justification is the evidence that God offers, we

These words of the eunuch provide the springboard for the first lesson herein discussed. The New Testament is the fulfillment of the Old and is the culmination of God’s revealed will to mankind. It has been said like this: the Old Testament is the New Testament concealed and the New Testament is the Old Testament revealed. God’s inspired revelation would be incomplete without either of the Testaments. The Old is incomplete and unfulfilled without the New, and the New is built upon the foundation provided by the Old. The eunuch’s above response is indicative of the fact that the Old Testament is hardly understood without the light shed upon it by the New. One reads Isaiah’s prophecy today in the fifty-third chapter and readily discerns that the prophet was foretelling the sufferings of Christ. But this is because one today has knowledge of the New Testament and likely has a copy of it at his disposal. The eunuch had neither of these luxuries. He could not fully understand Isaiah’s prophecy, for he had not yet come in contact with God’s divine commentary on Old Testament prophecy—the New Testament. On the day of Pentecost the Holy Ghost was sent down from heaven and guided the apostles into all spiritual truth (John 16:13; Acts 2). Thus, the inspired men of the first century (namely the apostles and those on whom the apostles laid their hands [Philip would be one of the latter]) preached concerning the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies pertaining to Christ (I Peter 1:10-12). The inspired evangelist Philip, therefore, was just what the eunuch needed to understand the prophecies of Isaiah—a walking New Testament.

The second lesson one may glean from Philip’s dealings with the eunuch is the fact that Christ is mentioned in the Old Testament. Acts 8:35 reads, “Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.” The same *scripture* mentioned in this verse is straight out of the book of Isaiah. Though the New Testament is that which is dedicated with Christ’s blood (Matthew 26:28) and that under which man lives today (Galatians 3:24-25; Hebrews 10:9-10), the Old Testament does speak of Christ as the future Messiah. Jesus told the Jews of His day, “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.” (John 5:39). The only scriptures in existence at the time of Christ’s speaking these words were the Old Testament scriptures. They had been committed to the Jews (Romans 3:2), who had grown to adopt the attitude that they basically had salvation in

the mere possession of the Old Testament scriptures. But Jesus tells them that they need to go back and read the scriptures again, for the very Scriptures they possessed foretold of the Christ whom they were going to reject. Hence, Christ can be seen throughout all of scripture, whether in the foretelling of the Old or in the fruition of the New.

Thirdly, one sees from Philip and the eunuch that it is impossible to preach Christ without preaching baptism into Christ. Luke only tells us generally that Philip preached Christ (Acts 8:35), but the very next verse reads as follows. "And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?" (Acts 8:36). Something in Philip's preaching impressed upon the eunuch the need to be immersed in water. This had also been the case in Philip's earlier preaching unto the Samaritans. He preached Christ unto them (Acts 8:5), and those that believed were baptized (Acts 8:12-13). Baptism is the doorway into Christ (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3), wherein one receives the cleansing effects of His shed blood (Colossians 1:14; cf. Acts 22:16). Scriptural baptism is administered by the authority of Christ (Acts 2:38) as well as by the authority of the Father and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). Jesus taught that one must be born of the Water and of the Spirit in order to enter into the kingdom of heaven (John 3:5). Certainly, to preach Christ in the entirety of His doctrine would include preaching the conditions disclosed by Christ as to entrance into His kingdom.

In the fourth place, one sees from Philip's dealings with the eunuch that there are prerequisites to scriptural baptism. When the eunuch asked what hindered him from being baptized, Philip replied, "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest." (Acts 8:37a). Jesus taught that faith in the gospel must precede an individual's baptism when He stated the following. "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." (Mark 16:15-16). On the day of Pentecost Peter also preached that repentance must precede an individual's baptism. "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." (Acts 2:38). One who is impenitent at his immersion simply goes down a dry sinner and comes up a wet one. Baptism is to be the

Will you not reconsider? Jesus is your only hope. Believe on Him, and be baptized into His death. Arise to walk in a new life, rejoicing on account of sins forgiven.

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REVELATIONS FROM ROMANS

Jim Bullington

Justification and condemnation are poles apart in God's Divine economy. They are opposites. The fate of justified individuals is also opposite and far removed from the fate of the condemned. Paul reveals in the book of Romans that justification is the result of the righteous act of God through Jesus Christ. Consider this grand theme as we continue to review "Revelations from Romans"

THE FREE GIFT

I must admit that most free gifts: aren't free, or as someone has so eloquently put it, "There ain't no such thing as a free lunch!" However, the free gift that Paul writes about in Romans 5 is really free. "Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life." (Romans 5:18). This free gift was given about 2000 years ago on a hill outside the city of Jerusalem. It was given without regard to the condition of those who would receive it. It was the result of true unconditional love.

Hear how Paul expressed it "For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:6-8). In that righteous act, the Son freely gave Himself for the purpose of redemption. His life was not taken; it was given! As events brought Him closer and closer to the fateful day in Jerusalem,

Upon hearing the word of the good news of Jesus, the jailor was in the position to believe, and believe he did. He came to believe not only in Jesus but also in the true God, the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. He evidenced a reformation of life, for now he had washed the very stripes which his city's magistrates had laid upon Paul and Silas. He was baptized into the Christ in whom he believed. He was baptized for the remission of his sins (Acts 2:38). Just as surely as he had washed the wounds of Paul and Silas, in his baptism God had washed away his sins in baptism (Acts 22:16). Notice that he and the other members of his household who had believed the gospel submitted to baptism without delay. Why? There can be only one explanation: He wanted salvation, and one is saved by faith in Jesus, freed from sin, and raised to walk in newness of life *in baptism* (Romans 6:1-7; Colossians 2:12; I Peter 3:21).

It is reported that after baptism the jailor was rejoicing with his household. Why? Because when they came forth from the water, they were saved, having come to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and having been united with Him in His death. As has been observed many times, in the New Testament there is no account of any person rejoicing over sins forgiven prior to baptism. But there is ample evidence that following baptism unto the remission of sins, believers rejoice (both in Acts 16 and in Acts 8:39). The Lord Himself had said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). The story of the jailor illustrates this in a powerful manner. In view of these things, can there be any doubt in your mind that baptism lies between the believer and salvation?

FOLLOWING THE STEPS OF THE JAILOR

What about you? Have you known about Jesus but dismissed Him from your life and mind? Has something happened in your life to cause you to realize your need to be saved? Are you now willing to give the gospel a more careful hearing? Jesus Christ is the Son of the Most High God and the Lord. He died for the sins of humanity, and was raised from the dead. He now sits on the right hand of the Majesty on high.

burial of the old man who has died to sin (Romans 6:3-5). After one comes to belief in the gospel of Jesus Christ, has made the decision to repent and turn away from sin, and has confessed Christ outwardly, he is then a scriptural candidate for baptism. Christ taught the necessity of confession in Matthew 10:32-33, and Paul noted that Timothy had made such a confession (I Timothy 6:12). The account of the Ethiopian eunuch shows one that the good confession comes prior to the individual's baptism.

One can clearly see the various aspects involved in man's salvation from looking at the account of Philip and the eunuch. God's word is where the process begins, for it reveals God's will for sinful man. Man, in turn, must search this inspired will in order to learn God's plan of righteousness and to come to know the one true Savior, Jesus Christ. Finally, man must act. Upon learning God's will and realizing the Savior, man must comply with the conditions of salvation God has set forth in His word. These include faith, repentance, confession and baptism for the remission of sins.

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THE CONVERSION OF SAUL

Phil Grear

Saul was a man with a mission. He was convinced that his religion was being threatened by the spread of Christianity, and so had to be stopped. He was so zealous in his persecution of Christians that he had he "made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison." (Acts 8:3) He was "exceedingly mad against them" and "persecuted them even unto strange cities." (Acts 26:11) One such city was Damascus, Syria to which he went with the authorization of the chief priests in Jerusalem in order to punish Christians.

**THIRD ANNUAL UPON THE ROCK
LECTURESHIP
FEBRUARY 23-24, 2002**

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 23

**9:00 "O Worship the King" - A.J. Cox,
Allons, TN.**

**10:00 "Soldiers of Christ Arise" - Phil
Grear, Springfield, OH.**

**11:00 "Master The Tempest Is Raging"
- James Bullington, Gainesville, GA.**

**12:00 noon—1:30 pm - Lunch is
Provided**

**1:30 "Why Did My Savior Come To
Earth?" - Mike Gors, Ft. Wayne, IN.**

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 24

**9:30 "Amazing Grace" - James
Bullinton**

**10:30 "A Beautiful Life" - Brandon
Britton, Pulaski, TN.**

**6:00 pm "Will Your Anchor Hold?" -
Brandon Britton**

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and the jailor knew he needed salvation. He sees the need to inquire of Paul and Silas about this way of salvation from the Most High God.

THE JAILOR IS POINTED TO JESUS

At this point, the pagan jailor has come to realize he is in need of salvation and that Paul and Silas are the ones who can tell him how to be saved. Previously, during the days while Paul and Silas had been in Philippi, the message of Jesus had been proclaimed by them. Since there was no synagogue in the city, they would have been preaching to the townspeople. Many viewed the preaching of Jesus as nothing but a disturbance and an advocacy of customs which are not lawful for Romans to accept. The jailor may have been among those who took this view and thus dismissed the message from his mind without much further thought. But now that he has experienced the earthquake, he is ready to listen a little more closely.

The emphasis in the response to the jailor's inquiry is upon the *Lord Jesus*. Paul's announcement in verse 31 stresses that it is *this Jesus you have dismissed* upon whom you must believe if you and your household are to be saved! You must reconsider him whom you and may of the people of Philippi have brushed aside. And we may be sure that at this point the jailor was ready and willing to reconsider him. He is now ready to hear the gospel with an eager mind, to be open to the prospect of believing in Jesus. But, "...how are they to believe in whom of whom they have never heard?" (Romans 10:14). Let him hear about this Jesus and consider!

THE JAILOR HEARS THE GOSPEL AND RESPONDS (ACTS 16:32-34)

The report indicates that "...they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their wounds, and he was baptized at once, with all his family. Then he brought them up into his house, and set food before them; and he rejoiced with all his household that he had believed in God."

There are three movements which should be considered in the study of this text. The first part of the story relates how the jailor was led to see the need of being saved (verses 16-28). The second part (verses 29-31) tells how the jailor came to be ready to hear the gospel of Christ. The third part of the story (verses 32-34) informs us of the manner in which the jailor came to experience salvation in Christ and the joy of being a believer. It is essential that the reader see this movement of the story and to understand the transitions from part to part. Regrettably, many have been led to see verse 31 (“Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household”) as the total response to the gospel. This verse has been used, out of its context, to suggest that salvation from sin occurs at the moment of belief. There is more involved. Reading the entire account is the corrective to this misunderstanding.

THE JAILOR SEES THE NEED (ACTS 16:16-28).

The Philippian jailor was no doubt a pagan, as is implied by verse 34. Up to this time he had not believed in the true and living God, but believed in idols. In his ignorance, likely he was content with his life as a pagan. He neither knew that he was a sinner, nor that the true God had provided a way of salvation from sins. In connection with the arrest and imprisonment of Paul and Silas, events would occur which would prepare for his hearing the gospel.

First, the arrest of Paul and Silas was due to their casting the spirit of divination out of a young girl. She had persistently cried, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation” (Acts 16:17,18). The jailor into whose charge Paul and Silas were committed would have been aware of these matters to some extent.

Next, an earthquake occurred, opening the prison doors and loosening the prisoners’ fetters. The earthquake would have caused the jailor to fear and to recognize that there was something extraordinary about Paul and Silas. This impression would have been intensified by their not escaping when the opportunity was available. The jailor then knew that there was truth in what the girl had cried,

“And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven.” (Acts 9:3) Out of this light he heard a voice from heaven saying, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” (Acts 9:4) Jesus, whom Saul had insisted was an impostor, was now speaking to him. He now realized that Jesus truly was the Son of God. And with that everything in Saul’s life changed. All of the assumptions by which he had lived his life were altered. Everything he had ever believed about religion would have to be reevaluated, and much of it discarded. Those whom he had imprisoned and put to death had been right. He left this encounter with Jesus as a blind man, being led by the hand into the city. (Acts 9:8-9) Although physically blind, he saw things more clearly than he ever had in his life.

SAUL SAW THAT HE WAS LOST!

Saul had always been very religious. He had lived “blameless” concerning the law of God. (Philippians 3:6) But his zeal and dedication to that which he had believed now meant nothing. He had been religious, but he had still been lost.

It is possible to be religious, but wrong. Some are sincere and genuine in their desire to serve Jesus, but still have not obeyed him. Jesus sadly warns that he will have to disappoint some on the Judgment Day, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.” (Matthew 7:21-23) They were confident enough to argue with Jesus, but he will have to deny knowing them. It is not enough to be sincere, one must be sincerely right.

Saul suddenly saw his situation as it truly was. He had been wrong and lost all those years,—as lost as anyone could be. No wonder he spent the next three days in prayer and fasting.

SAUL SAW HIS SAVIOR!

Saul literally beheld the Jesus he had always denied. But he beheld him spiritually as well as physically. This Jesus, whom he had so tried to defeat, was the only one who could save him from eternal doom. He would have to humbly surrender to this one he had denied for so long. But he had no choice if he was to be saved.

We will not look to Jesus until we see the need for a Savior. Only when we realize that the teachings of man cannot rescue us from hell will we be ready to turn to Christ. Only Jesus can save us. We must do as he commands without argument. The once-proud Saul now addressed Jesus as, “Lord” (Acts 9:5).

SAUL SAW HIS RESPONSIBILITY!

Saul asked the world’s most important question, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?’ (Acts 9:6). He did not ask, “What wilt thou have me to believe?” He would have to *do* something. Some preachers today would have told him, “There is nothing you can do, just believe and you will be saved.” But that was not Jesus’ answer. Jesus told him, “Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do” (Acts 9:6). Some have argued that Saul was saved on the Damascus road. But if he was, instead rejoicing in his salvation he spent three days begging God for help and refusing to eat. What was Saul told to do in Damascus. Through a preacher named Ananias, Jesus told him, And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). The instructions were very specific. He was to “arise and be baptized” in order to “wash away” his sins. If he did not do as he was told, he would not have his sins washed away. We have the same responsibility to obey as did Saul. We also must “arise and be baptized” to wash away our sins. Any other answer does not come from the Bible, and so is to be rejected. Fortunately Saul could say, “I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision” (Acts 26:19). He “arose, and was baptized” (Acts 9:18).

Saul heard the word of God preached by Ananias. Having believed what he heard, he repented of his past way of life and determined to

with her husband, which he did. Her husband was baptized a little while later. After their conversion they have been faithfully serving the Lord. They have influenced many to obey the gospel. Nicoli is now enrolled in the Murmansk School of Preaching in Murmansk, Russia. The gospel, when planted in the right heart, can accomplish great things.

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THE CONVERSION OF THE PHILIPPIAN JAILOR

Tom McLemore

The cases of conversion reported in the book of Acts are very powerful testimonies to the vitality of the gospel of Christ and to the activity of the resurrected Lord Jesus in the lives of people in order that they might be saved. These reports emphasize that the early church grew by means of the conversion of individuals who came to know the saving gospel and responded to it. The reader observes readily that there is a homogeneity to all these stories. The same grand message was proclaimed to people throughout the Greco-Roman world, and the response to it was uniform: the people believed on the living Christ whom the message revealed, they showed signs of a reformation of their lives, and they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. These reports form a potent description of the precise manner in which people may be saved today, vix., exactly as those early converts had come to know Christ. One of those stories is that of a certain jailor in the Macedonian capital of Philippi. Please read Acts 16:16-34.

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and brethren, what shall we do” (Acts 2:37)? Remember that Paul and Silas are preaching the same gospel that was preached on that day. It was the good news about the death, burial and resurrection of our Savior that opened her heart. This same message sometimes has adverse effects on the hearts of people. When Stephen spoke to the Jewish leaders to give a defense for preaching the gospel, the message cut them to their heart to the point that they stoned him to death (Acts 7:54). But Lydia’s heart was prepared to receive the truth.

Luke further records that Lydian and her household were baptized (Acts 16:15). You do not find them seeking to persuade her to do what she *thinks* she is to do. She is ready to do what she learns to be the right thing. It is the same thing that all others must do in order to be saved. When Jesus commissioned his disciples to go into the whole world to preach the gospel they were to teach them to observe all things that were commanded them (Matthew 28:20). They were to baptize them, “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). They great commission is also stated in Mark’s gospel account, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:15,16). As we follow the apostles they went everywhere preaching the same message. When people heard, believed, repented of their sins they were baptized for the remission of their sins, just like Lydia and her household.

After Lydia was baptized she begged Paul and Silas to come to her house and stay. She now wants to do what she can to help those who are involved in trying to get the gospel to others. She asked them, “If you have judged me to be faithful in the Lord, come to my house and stay, and she constrained us” (Acts 16:15). This act of kindness is in perfect harmony with her character. Because of her respect for God, her practice of prayer and her new relationship with the Savior she is motivated to want to do more.

As I write this article I am reminded of my first trip to Russia in 1997. I met a woman named Lydia. She reminded me of this woman of Acts 16. She was one of the first converts in Sosnogorsk, Russia. After her conversion she constrained the preacher there to continue to study

live in obedience to Christ. He was then baptized to have his sins washed away. We know what Saul did was right. Only when we match what he did can we be right. May we be as sincere in our desire to please God as was Saul.

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THE CONVERSION OF CORNELIUS

Mark E. Reynolds

The conversion of the Gentiles was a pivotal point in the history of Christianity. The account of the conversion of Cornelius is more than just the account of the salvation of one man and his family, although that alone would be worthy of holy writ, but it is also the introduction of something FAR greater. It is proof of God’s acceptance of the Gentile race into His family. We are thankful for God’s acceptance of the Gentiles, for this ultimately includes many of us who do not have a Jewish heritage, but whose ancestors had turned far away from God.

God had always intended that the Gentiles (nations other than Israel) would be a part of His redeemed family. Isaiah said, “All nations” would go up to the house of the Lord (Isaiah 2:2). Jesus talked about “other sheep” than the Jews (John 10:16). Christ tasted death for all men (Hebrews 2:9). God “so loved the WORLD” that He gave His only begotten Son (John 3:16). For almost ten years, the Jews evidently believed their responsibility was only to the Jews of the world, for it took a series of miracles to bring the Jews and Gentiles together in Christ. This is where Cornelius comes in.

CORNELIUS, THE MAN

Cornelius was a centurion serving under Herod Agrippa, the representative of Roman power in that district. Furthermore, he was an officer of the Italian band, that is, of a band made up of soldiers from Rome. Cornelius was a religious man, a man full of faith, and manifested that faith in his daily life. He expressed his faith in all the

right ways: He feared God, and made sure that all his house did as well; he gave MUCH alms to the people; and he was a man who saw the need for a healthy prayer life. The question is often asked, “Why would such a devout man have a need to be converted to Christ?”

Just because Cornelius was *religious* did not mean he was saved already without the gospel. He was indeed a Gentile “God fearer,” one of many Gentiles who accepted Jehovah as the true God and lived by the moral principles of the law. Though Cornelius was a “praying man” he was out of covenant relationship, and could not pray for and receive remission of sins. His prayers came up for a “memorial” before God, meaning that he had caught the attention of God (Acts 10:4). Cornelius was not one who was in open rebellion to God, but was one who walked in the light he had at that time (Acts 10:31). That is not to say that the prayer of a non-Christian is just as acceptable as a Christian’s prayer today. It is highly doubtful that we could say he was praying for salvation in the first place, which is what God gave him through his obedience. It is also very doubtful that we could say he was praying for a miracle, but that is what he got from God. His prayer was “heard,” and he had a visit from an angel—for which he was certainly NOT praying.

Cornelius was living in the transition period between the end of an acceptable religious age, and the receiving of the gospel. It would be difficult to think that would stop hearing Cornelius until he and the Gentiles were exposed to the gospel. God’s response to the prayer shows that this is something grand and unique, and a response that we will never see the likes of again. God’s response involved three miracles showing the uniqueness of the event. The first miracle was the appearing of an angel to the unconverted, for the purpose of telling him where to find a preacher (Acts 10:3-8). Angels are God’s messengers, but are limited in what the message is that they convey to human beings. The second miracle was the appearance of the Lord, for the purpose of convincing Peter (a Jew) to become an earthen vessel to the Gentiles, that is to preach the gospel to them. The third miracle was the outpouring or baptism of the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:44-45), as it had been poured out on another significant day, the Day of Pentecost, the birthday of the church (Acts 2; Acts 11:15). The Spirit did not fall upon the Gentiles to save them or because they

THE CONVERSION OF LYDIA

Larry G. Reynolds

The book of Acts reveals God’s great plan to redeem man through the preaching of the gospel. The gospel was to be preached in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8). In Acts 16:12 we are introduced to the gospel being preached in Philippi, which is the foremost city of Macedonia. In verse fourteen we are introduced to a woman named Lydia a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira. The things written about her are preserved for us to study and follow her example.

The first thing that Luke reveals about her is that on a Sabbath day she was with other women by a river where prayer was customarily made (verse 13). This woman was away from her homeland yet continued to worship God. She was following the Old Testament system of worship, because she had not yet learned of the New Testament order of things. Here is a case of one who demonstrated her respect for God by worshipping Him. She would not have any other gods before Him. She would not make any carved image or take God’s name in vain, because of her respect and reverence for God. This respect would help her receive the message that Paul and Silas would present to her. Her heart was prepared by her continued love and respect for God.

Next Luke tells us that Lydia “heard us” (Acts 16:14). Because of her love and respect for God, she wanted all that God would give her. Think about all the people who will miss the gospel message because they are unwilling to listen. Think of the minds that are closed because of preconceived ideas and prejudice. This woman would listen and open her heart to the gospel of Christ. Perhaps her previous knowledge of the Old Testament helped prepare her heart to receive the teachings about the Christ. It is said “whose heart the Lord opened” (Acts 16:14). God opened her heart by teaching her the gospel. The gospel is calculated to reach the heart. It did so in the case of those who listened to it preached on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of our Lord. “Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, men

Acts 11 he gave the order in which these events happened. He said, “And as I BEGAN to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them, as on us at the beginning” (Acts 11:15).

The Holy Spirit fell on them BEFORE Peter preached – at the beginning of the sermon. This is an important point, because many teach today when these people were immersed with the Holy Spirit they were saved at that point. But Peter said the Holy Spirit fell on them before they heard the words whereby they would be saved (Acts 11:14). The immersion of the Holy Spirit on these Gentiles was proof that God wanted the Gentiles to be part of His church just as he wanted the Jews who received the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost to be added to His church. This is a special account.

Further, Peter answered, “Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Spirit as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days” (10:47-48). I know that this is water baptism because he said no man can forbid WATER. Those Gentiles needed to be baptized just like those 3,000 Jews were on the day the church was begun (Acts 2:37-41). Cornelius was already a good man, so nothing is said about his repentance, but there is something said about his faith in Christ. He believed and was baptized like the Lord said. That is the account of the first Gentile in the world who ever became a Christian. From then until now, Jews and Gentiles have obeyed the same gospel and have done the same thing in order to be saved.

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HAPPY NEW YEAR!
FROM UPON THE ROCK

were already saved, for if this be the case, they were saved before and without “faith.”

THE VISIONS

The vision that Cornelius had was an open vision, a definite and actual vision. An angel appeared to him in the hour of his meditating. The angel told Cornelius that there was a recognition of everything that had gone before: “Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial to God” (Acts 10:4b). The angel came to an uncircumcised Gentile, with no part in the fleshly covenant, showing the fact that God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34).

The angel brought instructions to Cornelius: “Send men to Joppa, and fetch one Simon, who is surnamed Peter: he lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side” (Acts 10:6). By the words spoken by the angel it is evident that Cornelius was perplexed as to what he should be doing religiously with his life. It seems that he was questioning whether or not he was doing all that God commanded. He was told by the angel that Peter could tell him what he ought to do. How many times do good people do this same thing today? Perhaps our preacher says something we are not quite sure about or perhaps a creed book that your particular denomination follows is shown to be in contradiction with the Bible. What do we do when faced with this situation? Hopefully the same thing Cornelius does...search for the truth until we find it. Cornelius was put in touch with the right source. Immediately he sent servants to bring Peter to him, all the while, God was preparing Peter for this encounter.

Thirty miles away in Joppa Peter has a completely different vision, but one very important to the outcome of this account. If Peter had wanted to preach to the “dogs,” as many Jews called Gentiles in that day, he would have been doing so for the past ten years. But he did not so it was imperative that God get his attention, because it was God’s infinite plan that the Gentiles be brought into His kingdom.

Peter had gone to the housetop at the hour of prayer. To Cornelius an angel was sent, to Peter a vision was given. As Peter, a Jew, saw the vision he saw a strange vessel in the form of a great canvas, filled

with all kinds of animals. There would instinctively be the repulsion of the Hebrew against them. Then a voice was heard: "Rise, Peter; kill and eat" His answer was, "Not so, Lord." Peter, the Hebrew, would have never eaten anything common or unclean (Acts 10:14). Then came this remarkable word to him, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common" (10:15). The idea conveyed to Peter was that of the cleansing of all, and therefore the putting away forevermore of those ceremonial limitations which had cursed the Hebrew religion. This happened three times, and while Peter thought about what it meant the men that Cornelius sent came to him.

The men sent by Cornelius arrived at the perfect time, because again a voice told Peter, "Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them" (Acts 10:20).

CORNELIUS AND PETER MEET

When Peter and his entourage got to Cornelius' house, Cornelius came out to meet them; he saw Simon Peter and fell down to worship him. If Peter had truly been the first Pope, this would have been right in line, but Peter told him, "Stand up; I myself also am a man" (10:26). He did not give him his ring to kiss, but rather told him to get up. Then Peter asked why Cornelius sent for him. Cornelius answered, "Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, and said,...Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; ...who when he cometh, shall speak unto thee...Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God" (10:30-33).

Cornelius was ready to hear the gospel. Peter was ready to preach it to him. The only trouble was that he had brought other Jewish Christians with him who did not want Peter to preach to "heathens." Everyone was ready except those Jews. Peter began to preach and as he preached, "the Holy Spirit fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the Holy Spirit. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God" (10:44-46). When Peter cited this account in

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