

Acts 054  
The Church's Progress  
Acts 9:30-35  
October 9, 2024  
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Let us open our Bibles this evening to Acts 9:39. We are continuing this evening in our verse-by-verse teaching through the Book of Acts.

The first half of Acts 9 is about Paul—how Saul became Paul—it is about Paul's conversion. We have just about finished that, believe it or not. There was a revelation given to Paul as he was traveling to Damascus to arrest Christians (Acts 9:1-9). He is temporarily blinded at that point, but that is a small price to pay for your spiritual sight, which he received. Then there is his physical healing from blindness (Acts 9:10-19a).

Next is his first preaching in the synagogue (Acts 9:19b-22). He was pretty popular. He was so popular that they tried to kill him—a conspiracy against Paul (Acts 9:23-25). The disciples, the ones that Saul came to Damascus to kill, now that Saul is saved, get him out at night. There is that story of him being lowered over the wall in a basket. They get him to Jerusalem.

Saul's Conversion (Acts 9:1-43)

- I. Saul (9:1-31)
  - A. Revelation (1-9)
  - B. Healing (10-19a)
  - C. Preaching (19b-22)
  - D. Conspiracy against Saul (23-25)
  - E. Return to Jerusalem (26-30)
    - 1. Jerusalem believers' response (26)
    - 2. Barnabas takes Saul to apostles (27)
    - 3. Saul's Jerusalem ministry (28-29)
    - 4. Saul's escape (30)
  - F. Saul's progress (31)
    - 1. Geography (31a)
    - 2. Edification (31b)
    - 3. Walk (31c)
    - 4. Comfort (31d)
    - 5. Numerical growth (31e)

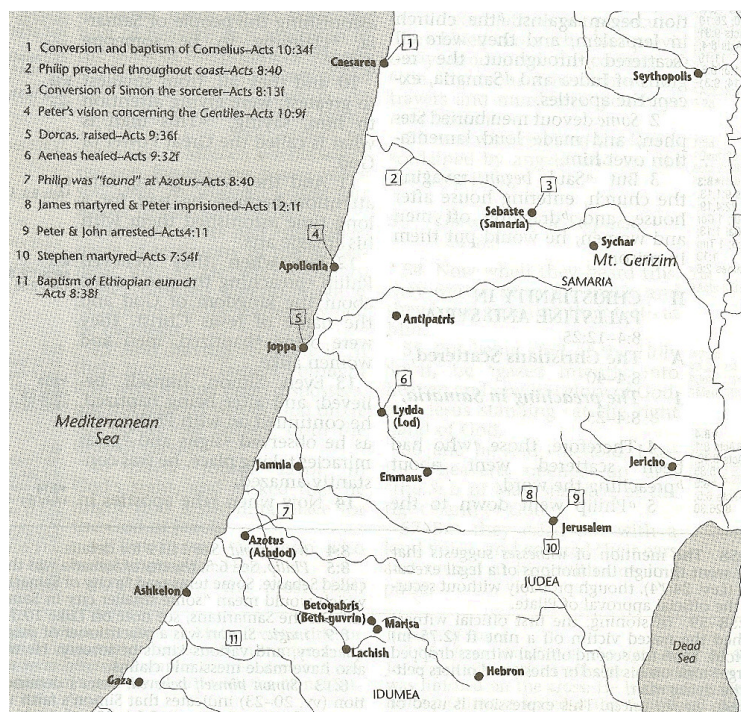
Acts 9:26-30 is Paul's return to Jerusalem. You see Jerusalem's response to Paul (Acts 9:26). I am not even sure the name Paul has been used yet; he is still known as Saul. They are really standoffish with this guy because he was their persecutor. They do not trust him, but Barnabas takes Saul to the rest of the apostles (Acts 9:27). You see

Saul's ministry there in Jerusalem (Acts 9:28-29): first among the apostles (Acts 9:28) and secondly amongst the Hellenistic Jews who were arguing with him must have been quite an argument (Acts 9:29). It says, "...they were attempting to put him to death." That is pretty heated.

This is the second murder attempt on Saul—one in Damascus and now one in Jerusalem. In Acts 9:30, which is where we left off last time, you see Saul's escape from Jerusalem. We will pick it up here. When the brethren learned of the attempt by the Hellenistic Jews, the diaspora Jews in Jerusalem, to put Paul, who is still known as Saul, to death, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus.

Here is Saul in Jerusalem, and he has pushed up north into Caesarea. Caesarea is going to be a big deal in the next chapter, because that is going to be the location of the first Gentile conversion: the household of Cornelius. From Caesarea, they push Paul back up north to Tarsus (Acts 9:30). Tarsus, of course, is Paul's hometown. It is in Tarsus that he is going to spend about ten years. The Jewish believers knew of this second conspiracy on Saul's life, and they pushed him down to Caesarea and then to Tarsus.

This is so interesting to me, and I trust you find this interesting: "...they brought him down to Caesarea..." (Acts 9:30). That is a perfect description of the geography moving away from Jerusalem, because when you go to Jerusalem, you are going up, you are ascending. I have been on a few trips to Israel myself. The bus driver typically puts it into higher gear on the bus to get us up to Jerusalem.



That is where the Psalms of Ascent come from. There is a section in the Book of Psalms called the Psalms of Ascent, and those are basically the Psalms that the Jewish people sang as they were making their upward ascent to Jerusalem to celebrate the various feasts. That is why they are called Psalms of Ascent.

Obviously, whoever wrote this—and we believe it was Luke—understood the geography of up and down, up to Jerusalem, down from Jerusalem. That is why it is hard to argue that some guy stitched this together, long after the fact. Whoever wrote this—we believe it was Luke that wrote it—had a great familiarity with the geography of the time. You find this over and over again in the Bible. The Bible, when it presents things, presents a scenario which is geographically very credible.

At that point, Saul was pushed up north to Tarsus. That was his hometown, and it is there he spends about ten years. I think at this point, it is referenced in Galatians 1:21, that you have to bring in to piece together the chronology of Paul's early believing life: *"Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia"* (Galatians 1:21). Syria is where Tarsus is, up north.

It is probably during that time period that he had his thorn in the flesh, because he had been taken into the third heaven and heard things a man is not fit to hear. To keep him humble, the Lord gave him a thorn in the flesh. He probably had that whole vision in Tarsus around this time, during these ten years.

He also makes a reference to it in 2 Corinthians 12:1-4, where he is comparing his credentials to those of his detractors there in Corinth, who were calling themselves the "super apostles." He was showing that his apostleship is much higher than theirs. One of the things he uses to argue his point is this experience he had where he was taken into the third heaven.

*"Boasting is necessary, though it is not profitable; but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago..."* This would fit Saul's early life. *"Whether in the body I do not know or out of the body I do not know, God knows..."* He does not even like using his name; he is embarrassed this happened to him. *"Such a man was caught up..."* I believe this is our same Greek word for "rapture"—"harpazo." Paul had his personal rapture. Was he in his body? Was he out of his body? He does not know, *"God knows—such a man was caught up to the third heaven"* (2 Corinthians 12:1-2).

This is how the Greeks divided heaven: The first heaven would be the distance from the ground to the clouds; the second heaven would be the distance from the clouds to the stars; and the third heaven is beyond the stars, where God lives. That is where Paul was caught up to.

*"And I know such a man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows—was caught up to Paradise and heard*

*inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak" (2 Corinthians 12:3-4).*

He heard things that normal people do not hear when he had this temporary experience. As you round out 2 Corinthians 12, he explains how God had to give him a thorn in the flesh to keep him in a state of humility, because knowledge puffs up. It was probably at this time, during this ten-year period in Tarsus, that he had that experience.

It is interesting to me that when he had this experience, he did not immediately write a book about it. It happened to him 14 years earlier. He cannot really explain exactly what he heard because he says the words were inexpressible, and he was embarrassed that it happened to him. That is the exact opposite of what people do today when they get caught up into heaven, allegedly. They can tell you exactly what happened, exactly what Jesus looked like.

I was listening to one guy and he said he got in a splash fight with Jesus at the water of life. You hear all this kind of stuff and they immediately come back and they want to make a movie and they want to get famous. Pardon me if I am just a tad doubtful of it, because what they are describing is very different from the way Paul narrates his own experience.

That is the time period when this happened, during that ten-year period in Tarsus, after the rest of the brothers knew that the Hellenistic Jews were trying to kill him. They got him up to Caesarea, which will be a big deal in the next chapter, and then up to Tarsus, his hometown. That is where he is for ten years, where he has this experience where he was caught up to the third heaven.

Then you come to Acts 9:31 and you see Saul's progress. This is not just a description of Saul's personal progress as a new Christian with his ministry; it is really a description of the whole church and the progress it had now made up to this point in time. Notice what Acts 9:31 says, as Luke stops writing and gives what we call a progress report:

*"So the church throughout all of Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase" (Acts 9:31).*

Luke drops in a progress report concerning the church, which was born in Acts 2. First of all, notice the geography: *"So the church went throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria" (Acts 9:31).* It would make sense that Luke would talk about that, because that is what Jesus said the church would experience after He ascended to heaven. Do you remember what He said to the disciples just prior to His ascension in Acts 1:8? There was a 40-day ministry that He had with them in between His resurrection and ascension. One of the things He said to them was:

*"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and*

*Samaria* [those are outer counties], *and even to the remotest part of the earth*" (Acts 1:8).

Jesus Himself said, through a short-term prediction before He ascended, that the church's ministry would start in Jerusalem. It would go into Judea; it would go into Samaria; and then it would go into the outer reaches of the earth. That is why Luke, here in Acts 9:31, is mentioning the progress of the church in Judea and then Galilee and then Samaria.

Then a statement is made here about the edification of the church:

*"So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace..."* They had peace with God because, by the baptizing ministry of the Spirit, they were put into the same body, metaphorically speaking—they had peace with each other. "...[the church] *enjoyed peace, being built up*"—that is the purpose of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The gifts of the Holy Spirit, which are given according to God's will, are given to build up the body of Christ.

Every believer has at least one gift. I say that because 1 Corinthians 12:7, 1 Peter 4:10, and I think Ephesians 4:7, all use the word "each." One of the things the Lord does with you, the moment you trust Christ, is He immediately at that point gives you a spiritual gift. Spiritual gifts are Spirit-empowered abilities to serve God in a special way.

The great thing about the spiritual gifts is that, once you discover your gift, it will get you outside of your narcissistic box, where we are focused on ourselves all the time, because each of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, when they are in operation, end up blessing somebody else. The gift of mercy blesses another person; the gift of administration blesses another person; the gift of teaching blesses another person. You will discover that about all these gifts.

Apparently these gifts were in full swing and the church was being built up as a result. This is why Paul says about spiritual gifts, in 1 Corinthians 14:26, concerning the assembly of the Corinthians:

*"What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification"* (1 Corinthians 14:26).

What he is doing is listing all the various gifts of the Holy Spirit that were in operation in the early church at that time. "Edification" means "building." As the gifts are in play, essentially what happens is other people in the body of Christ are being built up in the things of God. The purpose of the spiritual gifts really is to edify the church.

I remember in the 90s, I was really interested in attending seminary, and I found a seminary that I could afford near my house in Orange County, California. They had a theology which is a little bit different from mine today. They were very Pentecostal—

speaking in tongues, you can lose your salvation, the doctrine of the second blessing, all those kinds of things—but I really enjoyed being around those guys. They were great brothers in the Lord.

I remember the older guy leading the class said, "Our purpose is not to tear the church down; it is to build the church up." He was talking about how sometimes you can come back from seminary and you can be so filled with knowledge and know something that might be unsettling to somebody else. The example he gave was that maybe everybody thinks David wrote such and such a psalm, but it turns out David was not the author of that particular psalm.

He was warning us young guys about getting in front of the church and displaying our knowledge: "David did not write that psalm." He said, "You have to go easy with that stuff because what you are doing is you are tearing people down. It is okay to expose ignorance and try to educate people, but just be very careful how you do it, because the ultimate calling of a pastor, the ultimate calling of the spiritual gifts, is to build up the body of Christ, not to tear it down."

*"So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord..." (Acts 9:31).*

By *"the fear of the Lord,"* I do not mean you sit around trembling because you think a lightning bolt is going to strike you at any second. That is not what it means here by *"the fear of the Lord,"* although God did do that with Ananias and Sapphira. The fear of the Lord is basically the idea where you have respect for God and His ways. Your heart is to submit to God's ways, understanding that God's ways are higher than our ways. Once a person has that, their ability to think or acquire knowledge is off the charts.

*"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (Proverbs 1:7).*

Some of you said, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." The Bible does say that, but not there. The first time that phrase is used it does not say, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." It says, *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge."* Wisdom is knowledge applied, so obviously you need knowledge to apply it so that it becomes wisdom. "Gnosis" or knowledge at some point needs to become "sophia" or what the Hebrews called "hakma", which is knowledge applied.

You cannot apply what you do not know. So how do you get knowledge? Proverbs 1:7, the first time it mentions this concept, says that what gives a person knowledge is the fear of the Lord. The reason that is so is because your mind now thinks the way it is supposed to think, because it is submitted to God and it is functioning within its purpose.

You have some extremely brilliant people out there on planet Earth that come up with some of the craziest things I have ever heard. I come from a family of really smart people, myself not included. I am talking about one uncle who was number one in mathematics at the Air Force Academy. He was trying to explain to me his thesis that he

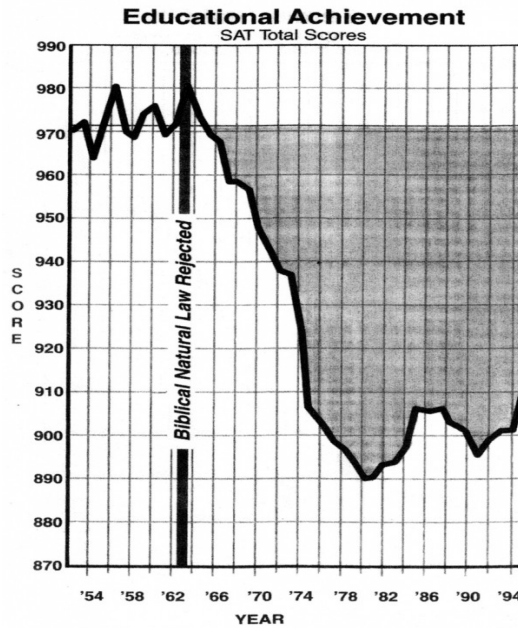
used to graduate from there, and I could not understand a single word he was saying. It was so over my head.

You have some really smart people out there, and yet they all think evolution is true. They think this universe just came about accidentally. What do you do with that? What do you do with a darkened intellect like that? It is an intellect that is not functioning the way it is supposed to because it is not submitted to God.

Ezekiel 28 tells us that when Satan fell, his mind became darkened. A brilliant mind, but it stopped working the way it was supposed to work, because it was not functioning under the rules of the owner's manual—God Himself. That is why the Bible teaches that: *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge."*

We are living in this time period where people want to teach humanism and godlessness in the public schools. Whenever there is some kind of educational problem, we think we just need to throw more money at it—we need to hire more guidance counselors. We need to hire better teachers—not understanding that the first thing you need to learn correctly is you need to be in an environment where your mind is submitted to the authority of God. Once your mind is submitted to the authority of God, then your mind will think the way it is supposed to. Mathematics, which God is the author of, will start making sense and you will not be coming up with crazy ideas.

That is why, when the fear of the Lord comes up in our studies, I always like to put up this chart. It is dealing with the SAT scores in the United States. By the time you hit the year 1962, you can see in the graph that SAT scores in the United States, which basically measure knowledge, took a precipitous decline.



1

People ask, "What happened in 1962? Do we have our Hurricane Helene in 1962? Did we have Hurricane Milton in 1962?" In a way, we did. That was the year that the Supreme Court threw Bible reading and prayer out of the public schools, even though it had been a standard practice in the United States going back to our inception as a nation.

The moment that happened, you took God out of school. If you take God out of the equation and fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, then obviously, there would be a precipitous decline in understanding because the mind cannot think the way it is supposed to think if it is not submitted to the authority of God. You can hire more and more teachers. You can hire more and more guidance counselors. You can dump an infinite amount of money into the educational system. It is not going to change anything because God was taken out.

*"So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord..." (Acts 9:31).*

They had the fear of the Lord. They respected God. That is a good place to be in, because now you are in a position for the mind to be fully enlightened to its full capacity.

They were not just going on in the fear of the Lord, but they were going on *"in the comfort of the Holy Spirit"* (Acts 9:31).

Jesus said, in the Upper Room speaking of the Holy Spirit:

<sup>1</sup> David Barton, *Original Intent*, p. 245.

*"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you. Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful" (John 14:26-27).*

Jesus is saying there: "When the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, comes—and He is now available to every Christian post Acts 2, we have a relationship with the Holy Spirit that other ages could only dream of—one of the things that He will do is give you peace, not as the world gives. How does the world give peace? I am talking about internal tranquility. You can have that as long as your ducks are in a row, but once one of those things disappears, like health or finances or whatever, then, the peace the world gives disappears.

Jesus said that we can walk in peace when all hell could be breaking out in our lives externally. That is what He meant when He said:

*"Not as the world gives, do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled..." (John 14:27).*

Here is this little tiny group of Christians—they are not even called Christians yet; they will not be called Christians until Acts 11—continuing to progress, continuing to walk in the fear of the Lord, continuing to build one another up, continuing to walk in peace when they are just walking through wave after wave of persecution. The last time we checked, it was Saul before he was converted, trying to kill him in Damascus. How can they walk in that kind of peace and comfort when things on the outside look so bad? It is because they are walking in the peace that the Holy Spirit gives, not as the world, which is available to every child of God.

Paul in Philippians 4:6-7 talked about the peace of God which surpasses all understanding. In other words, it does not make sense to the unsaved world, but it is something that the Christian can experience. Jesus spoke of it elsewhere in the Upper Room:

*"These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace..." (John 14:27).*

That is the Greek word "eirene," where we get the word "irenic." It is the opposite of "polemos," "polemical" meaning "war."

*"These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).*

We can walk in this peace of God even though circumstances on the outside look bleak. In fact, when you start walking in it, the unsaved world will not really like the fact that

you are walking in it. They will be saying, "What is the matter with you? Why are you so calm?" Because they know that if they were in your situation, they would be hitting the panic button. It does not make sense to them why you can walk in peace.

You start walking in that, and suddenly the bottle that you used to reach out for, the drugs you used to reach out for, or the whiskey or the alcohol or the pills or whatever is your comfort of choice, you reach out for it, and the Holy Spirit inside of you says, "You do not need that anymore." "What do you mean I do not need it anymore, Lord?" "You do not need it anymore because I have given you the peace of God which transcends all understanding." That is why the world is always grabbing for those things, because they do not have what you have. They do not have what is available in Christ Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

Next you have a statement here of their numerical growth: "*...it continued to increase*" (Acts 9:31). That is talking about numbers. There were converts, and the church was growing. That is why Luke wrote this book to Theophilus, to explain to him the birth and growth of the church numerically, geographically, and ethnically.

How does Luke document that in this book? He documents it numerically by pointing to progress reports. He documents it geographically by talking about the geographical movement of the church from Jerusalem, ultimately to Rome. That is why all those places of geography are mentioned in Acts 9:31: Judea, Galilee, and Samaria.

He documents it ethnically, how the church started as an offshoot of Judaism and grew and developed to the point where the dominant people group within the church became Gentiles, as the Nation of Israel and many Jews (not all) started to reject the message once Paul leaves the borders of Israel and goes on his missionary journeys.

One of the ways Luke documents the birth and growth of the church is through these progress reports. The first bullet point shows the clearest progress reports. For example, it talks about how the church started and about 3,000 were saved (Acts 2). You go to Acts 4 and it talks about how the number jumped to 5,000. It keeps saying things like that right into Acts 9:31, where there is a very clear progress report: "*...it continued to increase.*"

#### Progress Reports

- Clearest: Acts 2:47; 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:30-31
- Less clear: Acts 1:15; 2:41; 4:4, 31; 5:14, 42; 8:25, 40; 11:21; 13:49; 17:6

The second bullet point shows the progress reports that are there, but they are probably not as crystal clear as the ones in the first bullet point. This is a key way that Luke is explaining to Theophilus the growth of the church—who is really wondering if Christianity coming to him as a Gentile is an authentic move of God or not.

Luke says, "It is very authentic, Theophilus, because look at the supernatural growth of the church under persecution." That would make sense because what did Jesus say about the church? *"...and the gates of Hades will not overpower it"* (Matthew 16:19).

That wraps up the teaching on the conversion of Saul. For the second part of the chapter the spotlight is now on Peter (Acts 9:32-43). It is going to be Peter who is going to lead the first Gentile, and Gentiles, to Christ in Acts 10. You might look at that and think: That is really weird, because when you go back to Acts 9:15, God says of Saul that he will 'bear My name before the Gentiles.' Why is Saul not leading the first Gentiles to Christ? How come it is Peter when we just learned in Acts 9:15 that Saul is the apostle to the Gentiles?

The answer to that question relates to the keys of the kingdom which Jesus gave to Peter back in Matthew 16:19, up north, in a place called Caesarea Philippi. Jesus said this to Peter:

*"I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven"* (Matthew 16:19).

What do you do exactly with keys? You open a door. It was Peter that was given that key, so Peter is the one that has to open the door to the Gentiles. It has to be through Peter that the Gentiles first hear the gospel and are saved. Now, once the door is open, it stays open, it does not shut. That would leave room for Paul to come in and become the apostle to the Gentiles.

Paul was not given the keys; Peter was given the keys. That is why Acts 9 begins with the ministry of Saul and then concludes with the ministry of Peter, without Saul (or Paul) leading the first Gentiles to Christ. It must be Peter who does that. He is going to do that beginning in Acts 9:32, and the story progresses all the way through Acts 10, and all the way through Acts 11:8.

He is going to lead the household of Cornelius to Christ. Once that happens, he has opened the door, and the door will stay open. That will give opportunity for Saul to come in and be the apostle to the Gentiles.

Here goes Peter with his ministry in two places. He is going to open the door, so the spotlight is on Peter. First he is going to have a ministry in Lydda. Then he is going to have a ministry in Joppa. That is going to translate into momentum taking him to Caesarea, and it is in Caesarea that he is going to open the door of salvation to the first Gentiles, which is a major development in the church.

This is why, when the Samaritans came to Christ in Acts 8, the Holy Spirit was not given to them immediately. Generally, the way it works is when you believe in Christ, you get the Holy Spirit immediately, but not so the Samaritans, a different people group. Peter,

you will remember in Acts 8, had to lay hands on the Samaritans, and only then did they receive the Holy Spirit.

Why did Peter have to lay hands on the Samaritans before they had the Holy Spirit? The answer relates to the fact that Peter was given the keys, so he is the one that has to be instrumental in leading the first Samaritans to Christ. But once the door is open, it stays open and any Samaritan can come to Christ.

Now, the same thing is about to happen in Acts 10 relative to Peter leading the first Gentiles to Christ. That is why the Paul story has stopped at this point. Peter becomes the spotlight, because we still have a people group that has not come to know the Lord yet—the Gentiles. Peter is instrumental in that. He is going to turn the key and the door will be opened. Once it is opened, it is going to stay open and Peter will start taking a back seat to Paul, who is God's elective choice for the apostle to the Gentiles. That is why you are seeing the chronology that you are seeing here.

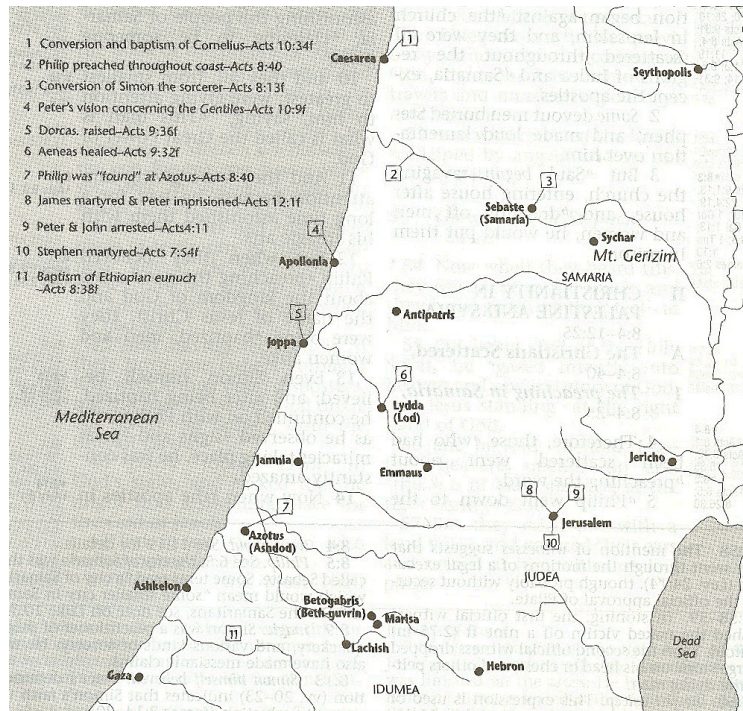
First of all, notice Peter's ministry in Lydda, which is preparing him for what is coming in Acts 10. We have the place of the ministry (Acts 9:32); the healing of someone named Aeneas (Acts 9:33-34); and the Word of God rapidly spreading (Acts 9:35).

- II. Peter (Acts 9:32-43)
  - A. Lydda (32-35)
    - 1. Place (32)
    - 2. Aeneas' healing (33-34)
      - a) Aeneas introduced (33)
      - b) Healing (34)
    - 3. Word spreads (35)
  - B. Joppa (36-43)

Notice the place of ministry:

*"Now as Peter was traveling through all those regions, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda" (Acts 9:32).*

Where is Lydda? There is Lydda on a map, and there is Jerusalem. If you ever want to know where Jerusalem is, just go to the top of the Dead Sea, hang a left, and you will hit Jerusalem. It is pretty easy to find on a map. Peter is moving from the area of Jerusalem, which was the location of the headquarters of the early church, to a place called Lydda.



You will notice that the believers in Lydda are called saints. First Corinthians 1:2 tells us that we are all saints by calling. Did you guys know that you are a saint? J. Vernon McGee said, "You are either a saint or you are an ain't." First Corinthians 1:2, to the worst church:

*"To the Church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling..." (1 Corinthians 1:2).*

It is very important to understand that when you trust in Christ, you are given as a gift, positionally, the transferred righteousness of Christ. You are a saint at that point. As a Christian, you do not have to live right to become a saint. If you were in a religious environment they would be telling you to be good so you could become a saint. Christianity is the exact opposite. I want to live right because I already am a saint.

If I engage in carnal behavior, it does not unseat me, it just means I am not living consistently with my identity. It is a completely different way of understanding sainthood. You have so many people striving to become saints. The Bible says you already are a saint, now live according to your new identity.

Those believers at Lydda are called saints. How do we get believers there in Lydda? Jesus said:

*"...you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remote part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).*

Christianity spread from Jerusalem to Lydda. Of course, when Saul of Tarsus persecuted the early church in Jerusalem they fled and went to different places, including Lydda.

*"But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison. Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word" (Acts 8:3-4).*

*"So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except the Jews alone" (Acts 11:19).*

This is how these early believers were spread outside of Jerusalem. Do you remember Philip, how he led the Ethiopian eunuch to Christ? He was taken to heaven in a personal rapture, but then he was brought back down—which I would not like. Lord, if you are going to take me up, I will just stay up there, thank you. I do not want to come back down. But Philip was brought back down.

*"But Philip found himself in Azotus, and as he passed through he kept preaching the gospel to all the cities until he came to Caesarea" (Acts 8:40).*

Some of those cities could have easily been Lydda, and that is how this group of believers were gathered in Lydda.

Next, you find a healing. Someone named Aeneas in Lydda is healed (Acts 9:33-34). First of all, Aeneas is introduced:

*"There he found a man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden for eight years, for he was paralyzed" (Acts 9:33).*

That is a long time to be bedridden. This guy was bedridden so that he could not even make his own bed. That is why he is going to be commanded when he is healed to get up and make his bed. He did not even have the ability to make his bed over the last eight years.

Sometimes in the Bible, we are given the lengths of time that people are in a sickened condition. You might recall that that happened in Acts 3:2 with the man that was healed in Jerusalem—the lame beggar.

*"And a man who had been lame from his mother's womb was being carried along, whom they used to set down every day at the gate of the temple which is called the Beautiful, in order to beg alms of those who were entering the temple" (Acts 3:2).*

He had been bedridden since his mother's womb. In John 5:5, Jesus healed a man who had been paralyzed for 38 years. It is common in the Bible that you get the length of time that a person has been in a sickness. There in Lydda, you run into this man named Aeneas who had been bedridden for eight years. Peter comes to Lydda and heals the man.

*"Peter said to him, 'Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; get up and make your bed.' Immediately he got up" (Acts 9:33).*

You will notice that Peter, when he does this healing, gives glory to Jesus Christ. He does not say, "Send money to my ministry and you will get healed," or things like that. He gives glory directly to who it belongs—Jesus.

Part of the Book of Acts is showing that Jesus is continuing to work even though He is in heaven; He is doing through the church from the Father's right hand, the identical things that He did when He was on the earth.

Peter tells him to get up and make his bed, and what does it say here? Immediately, after being bedridden for eight years, he got up. This is the kind of thing that you see in the Book of Acts concerning these healings. When God heals someone, it is instantaneous, with very few exceptions. I can only think of one example where a man was progressively healed of blindness in Mark's gospel. Other than that special case, when people are healed, it is something instantaneous.

It is not this thing where you are partly healed—go back to your doctor where you are going to get a 75% healing; then come back and give us a report three months later on TV, and you will get your full healing. This is the kind of thing you see with these televangelists, but this is an instantaneous healing.

Do you remember the man in Acts 3 who was lame from his mother's womb? When he was healed it says,

*"And seizing him by the right hand, he raised him up; and immediately his feet and his ankles were strengthened" (Acts 3:7).*

That is the kind of thing that happened here to Aeneas.

I do not know how big of a city Lydda was, but as you can imagine, word travels fast in these towns. Everybody starts to talk about how Aeneas, whom everybody knew was bedridden for eight years, is now healed. The word spreading is found in verse 35. It says,

*"And all who lived at Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord" (Acts 9:35).*

That would be the plain of Sharon. Again, these are very real places of geography. All of a sudden, the guy that they are all familiar with that is bedridden, is now making his bed and walking around. This causes countless people in Lydda to turn to the Lord.

"Turn to the Lord" needs to be handled correctly. It is the Greek word "strepho," and it is a synonym for "believe." "Believe" and "turn to the Lord" are used as synonyms—different words with the same meaning. You will find that meaning in 1 Thessalonians 1:9 concerning the conversion of the Thessalonians:

*"For they themselves report about us what kind of reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (1 Thessalonians 1:9).*

"Turning to God" and "believe" are used synonymously. You say, "How do you know it is synonymous here?" If you go down to Acts 9:42, where a similar healing is going to take place in Joppa, it says:

*"It became known all over Joppa, and many believed in the Lord" (Acts 9:42).*

"Turn to the Lord" is a synonym for "believe."

This is very common in the Book of Acts:

*"Peter said to them, 'Repent...'" (Acts 2:38).*

"Repent" means "to change your mind about Christ"—turn to the Lord.

*"And all those who believed were together and had all things in common" (Acts 2:44).*

Those that repented were believers; those that were believers repented. "Repented" means "to change your mind," because when a person truly believes in Christ and trusts in the provision of Jesus Christ, their mind has changed about who Jesus is. They have turned to the Lord; they have repented.

When Paul is going to speak on Mars Hill, later on in Greece, it says:

*"Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent" (Acts 17:30).*

Repent means to change one's mind about Christ.

*"But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them" (Acts 17:34).*

You can see that when Paul says "repent" and people respond to it, it says that they believed. When Peter says "repent," and people respond to it, the text says "believed." The reason I am going into this is because a lot of people will take the gospel, and they will turn it into two steps instead of one—the Texas Two-Step. We need to have two steps; one step is too easy.

Some people will say, "I am glad you believe, but have you turned to the Lord?" or "I am glad you believe, but have you repented?" The truth of the matter is, "repentance" and "turning to the Lord" are used synonymously. It is describing the full gamut of what happened.

Do not take this and develop two steps to Jesus out of this. A lot of people are teaching the A, B, C method of salvation—three steps. You have to: number one, admit you are a sinner; number two, you have to believe; and number three, you have to confess. Some say you have to "call upon the name of the Lord."

The truth of the matter is, biblically, there is one step. God puts a person under conviction. That is why they believe in the first place. They have a motivation to do it because they are convicted. That is not something you do; that is something God did. As you come under conviction, then you believe, which means to trust in the finished work of Jesus. As you have believed and trusted in the finished work of Jesus, your mind is changing, meaning you are repenting—that is what "repentance" means.

"Metanoeo"—"meta," change; "noeo," where we get "notion" or ideas that come out of the mind—"change of mind." It has nothing to do with emotion. If you want to trust Christ and cry a river, you can do that, but that is not required. Some people become very emotional when they trust Christ, but do not think that that is some kind of additional step: I have got to trust Christ and be emotional.

There is a totally different word used in Greek for emotion: "metamelomai," as in "mellow"—you need to mellow out, man. "Metamelomai" means "change of emotion." None of those words are used here. It is just "change your mind."

How do you change your mind about Jesus? You trust in Him. When I got saved when I was 16, where I thought I was going to get into heaven based on my own good works, I heard the purity of the gospel and I trusted in it. I stopped trusting myself, trusted exclusively in Jesus. As that happened, my mind just changed simultaneously. It was not some additional step. It was a synonymous step.

That is how to handle these different expressions. They turn to the Lord. Notice here, it talks about what they turn to, not what they turn from. Does not say they turn from their sins. Turning from your sins does not save you. If turning from your sin saves you, then the gospel is nothing more than a human work. I am not saved by turning from my sins; I am saved by turning to the Lord. That alone saves me.

What about sin in a person's life? God will take care of that. Do not worry about that. He will start bothering you about things in your growth in Christ that you were not bothered about before. The Holy Spirit will say, "You are using a lot of bad language that is not fitting for a child of God." You are shocked that you have that feeling because you never had that before. You just used foul language and there was no problem, but now you have something inside of you agitating you. Something greater than yourself is inside of you bothering you. That is not a step to justification. That is a step towards growth.

But we are not dealing here with growth, we are talking about how unsaved people get saved. They do one thing, which is to trust in Christ. As they are trusting in Christ, they are simultaneously turning to the Lord, or they are simultaneously repenting—changing their mind about Jesus. The gospel is not: Clean yourself up and come to Jesus. We understand that the gospel is: Come to Jesus on His terms through faith alone, and whatever cleaning up He is going to do of your personal life, He will do as you are growing in Christ. There is a lot of confusion today about this, and people are running around saying a lot of things that are not true. They are teaching a false gospel.

*"And all who lived at Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord" (Acts 9:35).*

People are so overwhelmed at this miracle that just happened that it had to have come from God, as Jesus Christ at the Father's right hand, was working through Peter. The people just saw this for what it was: a divine miracle. It was immediate, it was instantaneous, and many people in Lydda were coming to Christ as a result.

Then Acts 9:36-43, the folks in Joppa are going to call on Peter, because another miracle is going to happen. Many people are going to come to the Lord as a result of that. The power of Peter's ministry is actually going to propel him up north to Caesarea, where there is going to be a man named Cornelius who is going to come to the Lord. Cornelius' conversion is a big deal because he is a Gentile. This will be the first time the gospel is accepted by the Gentiles. From that point on, the pattern is going to be that more and more Jews will reject it, and more and more Gentiles will receive it.

This is how the church started off as an offshoot of Judaism and became a predominantly Gentile body that we see today, which made its way all the way to Rome to be a blessing to Theophilus. "Theophilus, you are contemplated in the plan and program of God," is why Luke, who is a physician, is recording all of this history in great detail.

Why did God choose Luke to record this history in great detail? Because Luke is a doctor. Doctors care about details, right? In fact, if you are going to a doctor and he does not care about the details, you might think about a new doctor. Doctors need to be detail-oriented. Obviously, Luke is extremely detail-oriented as he is recording this history, teaching us about how the church was born and how it matured.

The Old Testament is the preparation for the Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—are the manifestation of Jesus; the Book of Acts is the propagation of Jesus. That is what we are studying. The epistles are the explanation of Jesus, and the Book of Revelation is the consummation of Jesus. The whole Bible revolves around Jesus, and we are just reading about the propagation of it.