

CGYG & LIFE Bible Study - Acts
Acts 9:32 - 11:18

Read Acts 9:32-43

-How did Peter heal Aeneas? (cf. Acts 4:8-10) Why is it significant that Aeneas has been paralyzed for 8 years?
-healed him in the name of Jesus Christ ('Jesus Christ heals you'), as he had healed the cripple in Acts 4
-lengthy illness/paralysis prior to healing - an authentic miracle; presumably many in Lydda & Sharon knew of his condition

-What was the result of Peter's miracles?

- Christ's name exalted & many believed in Him
- 'all those who lived in Lydda and Sharon... turned to the Lord' (v.35)
- 'many people believed in the Lord' (v.42)

-Proponents of "power evangelism" argue from passages like this one that for evangelism to be most effective, it should be accompanied by signs and wonders. For example, Peter Wagner writes, "Across the board, the most effective evangelism in today's world is accompanied by manifestations of supernatural power." (quoted in MacArthur, Charismatic Chaos, p.138) John Wimber (who established the Vineyard movement) writes, "In power evangelism, resistance to the gospel is overcome by the demonstration of God's power in supernatural events, and receptivity to Christ's claims is usually very high." (Charismatic Chaos, p.138)

Do you agree or disagree? Should we expect to be able to do similar miracles today as part of our every-day Christian experience? (you might want to consider as part of your discussion Rom. 1:16; Rom. 10:17; Matt. 11:20-24, 12:38-41; Luke 16:31; 2 Cor. 12:12)

- the Gospel itself is the power of God for salvation (Rom 1:16); does not need to be supplemented to be effective
 - faith comes from hearing the message, and the message through the word of Christ (Rom 10:17) - no mention of miracles
 - many who saw miracles did not believe (Matt. 11:20-21), but many in Jonah's day repented Jonah's preaching (Matt. 12:41)
 - 'If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented...' - not to indicate that miracles would have made them repent when they otherwise wouldn't have, but that if they had had the same opportunities as Korazin & Bethsaida, they would have repented
 - those who do not believe the Word would not believe even if they saw miracles (Luke 16:31)
 - no doubt God can still work miracles, but we should not expect to be able to do them as part of normal Christian experience - signs and wonders were things that marked out apostles (2 Cor 12:12) & others who were bringing new revelation (e.g. Moses, Prophets, Christ (Acts 2:22))
- see also AGC Articles of Faith XII & XIII

Read Acts 10:1-48

-Who was Cornelius, and why did the angel command him to send for Peter (see also Acts 11:13-14)?
-a centurion (Roman soldier in charge of 100 men), of the Italian regiment (i.e. probably Italian)
-a Gentile, but a devout 'God-fearer' - i.e. feared & worshipped God, but not a full proselyte/not circumcised (cf. 11:3)
-angel commanded him to send for Peter that he might hear the Gospel and be saved

-Why might Peter have had reservations about going to visit Cornelius? How did God work to overcome those reservations?

- against Jewish tradition to associate with a Gentile or visit/eat with him (esp. due to dietary restrictions of clean/unclean)
- God overcame his reservations by
 - sending the vision 3 times (for emphasis) and commanding him not to call unclean what God had called clean
 - timing things such that the 3 men came while he was pondering the meaning of the vision
 - speaking to him inwardly through the Holy Spirit
 - through all this, showed Peter that he should not call any man impure or unclean (v.28), and that the Gospel was for all people, Jew & Gentile alike

-Do Peter's words in 10:34-35 indicate (as some have argued) that God accepts sincere followers of all different religions? Why or why not?

- no - otherwise, why all the trouble to bring Peter to Cornelius?
- these verses indicate that the Gospel is for people from all people irrespective of race/nation; but salvation still comes through Christ alone

-What elements of the Gospel did Peter share with Cornelius and those with him? What elements might you change if you were to share the Gospel with people who had no background at about who Jesus was? What elements would need to stay the same? (If time permits, you may want to compare with Acts 17:22-34)

- life and works of Jesus - witnessed by the apostles
- His death at the hands of the Jews
- His resurrection by God - witnessed by the apostles and some others
- His command to preach that He is coming as judge, but that forgiveness is available to all who believe

- might need to fill in more basic details with those with no background (e.g. cf. Paul in Athens, Acts 17)
- elements of His death, resurrection, judgment, repentance & forgiveness would still need to remain (as they did in Acts 17)

-What did the Holy Spirit descending on Cornelius and those with him indicate? Why was this event so significant that Luke recounts it twice (here, and once again in Acts 11)?

- indicates that the believed in Jesus when they heard the message
- indicates that God accepted their faith and brought them into the Church - demonstrated this by giving them the same gift (i.e. the Holy Spirit, with tongues) that the Jewish believers received at Pentecost
 - Peter recognized God's acceptance of them and ordered that they be baptized
- event was significant as it signaled the full incorporation of Gentiles into the people of God

Read Acts 11:1-18

-Why did the believers in Jerusalem criticize Peter?

- for visiting & eating with uncircumcised men (i.e. Gentiles) - presumably because he would have thus become unclean

-How did Peter deal with their criticisms? What can we learn from his response?

- gave them the complete account of the facts in the presence of witnesses who had been with him - seems the Jerusalem believers may not have had all the facts - maybe only bits & pieces that trickled in
- explained how the experience of the Gentiles agreed with Christ's words - showed that this was God's idea, not his

-How does the account of Peter and Cornelius apply to us today? How did God work in your life, and who did He bring into your life, to draw you to Himself? Who might He be using you to reach with the Gospel?

-some thoughts:

- God accepts people of all races into His family, so we also should - unity in the Holy Spirit
 - God calls people from all nations, so we should be diligent to go so that they might be reached
 - we should not call anyone 'unclean' - be willing to reach all, regardless of race, social status, etc.
 - we are responsible for proclaiming the good news - God could just as easily have proclaimed the Gospel to Cornelius through the angel but didn't; instead went through the trouble of bringing Peter in
 - pray that God would prepare those He'd call us to reach with the Gospel to receive that Gospel
- we are all Gentiles - need to give praise and thanks to God for His mercy to us in including us among His people

Reflection and Application

The conversion of Cornelius, his relatives and his friends is a landmark in the history of God's people. Whereas Gentiles had once been separated from the people of God, they were now brought into full membership in the family of God, through faith in Christ. As a seal of that faith, they received the same promised gift of the Holy Spirit that the Jewish believers received at Pentecost, and that the Samaritan believers received at the hands of Peter and John. As a result of Christ's work at the Cross, there is indeed among God's people "neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female," for we are all one in Him (Galatians 3:28).

Spend some time reflecting on God's great mercy to you, as Paul describes it in Ephesians 2:11-18: "Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called 'uncircumcised' by those who call themselves 'the circumcision' (that done in the body by the hands of men) - remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ... For through Him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit." Spend time praising God that He "has granted even the Gentiles [that's us!] repentance unto life!" Thank Him for the way He prepared you to receive the Gospel of Jesus Christ and for those He used to bring you that message of salvation. Offer yourself in willing obedience, likewise to reach out and share the Gospel with those to whom He would send you.