

Acts 29 – Week 3 – A Big Transition – Bible Study Helps

God's Transition to the Gentiles: The Spread of the Gospel in Acts

Sermon Summary: This sermon explores the historical transition in the early church as God begins to extend salvation to the Gentiles. It focuses on key events in Acts chapters 8-10, including the conversion of Saul (Paul), Philip's ministry in Samaria, and Peter's vision leading to the salvation of Cornelius and his household. The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding this transition to properly interpret the book of Acts and avoid false teachings. It highlights how God used various methods to confirm the inclusion of non-Jews in the church and the immediate indwelling of the Holy Spirit upon belief for Gentile converts.

Key Points:

- The stoning of Stephen in Acts 7 marks a pivotal moment in God's transition from focusing on the Jews to including Gentiles.
- The conversion of Saul (Paul) demonstrates God's power to save even the most ardent opponents of Christianity.
- Philip's ministry in Samaria shows the gospel spreading beyond Jerusalem and Judea.
- Peter's vision and subsequent visit to Cornelius' house marks the transition to Gentiles into the church without requiring them to become Jews first.
- The gift of tongues in Cornelius' house was a sign for unbelieving Jews to confirm Gentile salvation.
- Understanding the transitional nature of Acts helps avoid misinterpretation and false teachings about salvation and spiritual gifts.

Scripture Reference:

- Acts 8-10, with particular focus on Acts 10:44-48

Stories:

- The conversion of Saul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-19)
- Philip's ministry in Samaria and to the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:4-40)
- Peter's vision of unclean animals and subsequent visit to Cornelius' house (Acts 10:1-48)

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Discipleship and Small Group Guide: God's Transition to the Gentiles in Acts

Opening Prayer

Key Takeaways:

1. Acts 8-10 shows God's transition from focusing on the Jews to including Gentiles in His plan of salvation.
2. The conversion of Saul (Paul) marks a pivotal moment in this transition.
3. Peter's vision and encounter with Cornelius demonstrates God's acceptance of Gentiles.
4. The Holy Spirit's work differs during this transitional period compared to today.

Discussion Questions:

1. What stood out to you most from the sermon? Why?
2. How does understanding the historical context of Acts help us interpret it correctly?
3. Discuss the significance of Saul's conversion. How does his story encourage us in sharing the gospel with seemingly unlikely candidates?
4. What can we learn from Peter's initial hesitation and eventual obedience in going to Cornelius' house?
5. How does the account of Cornelius and his household receiving the Holy Spirit differ from how people receive the Spirit today? Why is this important to understand?
6. The sermon emphasized the importance of context in interpreting Scripture. Can you think of other passages that are often misinterpreted when taken out of context?
7. How does seeing God's plan unfold to include Gentiles impact your appreciation of your own salvation?

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Practical Applications:

1. This week, pray for an "unlikely" person in your life to come to faith in Christ.
2. Practice explaining to someone else why it's important to understand the transitional nature of the book of Acts.
3. Reflect on your own salvation story. Write a short paragraph expressing gratitude for how God brought you into His family.
4. Commit to being more attentive to the Holy Spirit's leading in sharing the gospel, like Philip was in Acts 8.
5. If you haven't already, memorize Romans 1:16 as a reminder of the power of the gospel for all people.

Closing Prayer

Encourage group members to continue studying Acts and to be ready to discuss chapters 11-12 next time.

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Discipleship Questions

How does understanding the historical context and transitions in the book of Acts help us interpret and apply its teachings more accurately today?

In what ways does Saul's dramatic conversion challenge our assumptions about who can be saved and used by God?

How might Peter's vision of unclean animals and subsequent interaction with Cornelius inform our views on cross-cultural ministry and breaking down barriers between different groups?

How does the account of Cornelius and his household receiving the Holy Spirit shape our understanding of salvation and the work of the Spirit in believers' lives?

In what ways does the transition from Jewish-focused ministry to Gentile inclusion parallel challenges the church faces today in reaching diverse populations?

How might the emphasis on witnesses and multiple confirmations in Acts inform how we approach and validate spiritual experiences or claims today?

What principles can we derive from Philip's obedience to the Holy Spirit's leading that apply to our own evangelism efforts?

In light of Peter's statement that 'God is no respecter of persons', how might we need to examine and adjust our own biases or prejudices in sharing the gospel?

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A 5-day Bible reading plan and devotional guide

Day 1: God's Transforming Power

Reading: Acts 9:1-22

Devotional: Saul's dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus reminds us that no one is beyond God's reach. Just as Saul was transformed from a persecutor to a passionate follower of Christ, God can radically change our hearts and lives. Reflect on areas in your life where you need God's transforming touch. Are there attitudes, habits, or relationships that need to be surrendered to Him? Remember, the same power that raised Christ from the dead is at work in you. Pray for God to continue His transforming work in your life, making you more like Christ each day.

Day 2: Breaking Down Barriers

Reading: Acts 10:1-23

Devotional: Peter's vision and subsequent visit to Cornelius' house illustrates God's desire to break down barriers between people. God showed Peter that He accepts people from every nation who fear Him and obey the Gospel. Consider the prejudices or biases you might hold, even unconsciously. How might God be challenging you to see and treat others differently? Ask the Holy Spirit to help you see people as God sees them, and to give you opportunities to extend love and grace to those you might normally avoid or overlook.

Day 3: The Power of the Gospel

Reading: Acts 10:34-48

Devotional: Peter's message to Cornelius and his household demonstrates the simple yet profound power of the Gospel. As Peter shared about Jesus' life, death, burial, and resurrection, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard and believed the message. This reminds us that the Gospel is not just information, but the very power of God unto salvation. Reflect on your own experience of hearing and believing the Gospel. How has it changed your life? Consider how you can share this powerful message with others in your sphere of influence. Pray for boldness and opportunities to speak about Jesus to those who need to hear.

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Day 4: God's Impartiality

Reading: Romans 2:11-16

Devotional: The story of Cornelius reminds us that God shows no favoritism, but accepts people from every nation who fear Him and obey the word of God. This challenges us to examine our own hearts for any traces of prejudice or discrimination. Are there people or groups you tend to write off as beyond God's reach? Remember that God's love and salvation are available to all. Ask God to give you His heart for all people, and to use you as an instrument of His impartial love in a divided world.

Day 5: The Holy Spirit's Work

Reading: Acts 2:1-21

Devotional: The falling of the Holy Spirit on the Gentiles in Acts 10 is interesting to consider. This demonstrates that the Holy Spirit's work is not limited by human categories or expectations. Reflect on how the Holy Spirit has been at work in your own life. Have you experienced His power, guidance, or comfort? Are you open to His leading, even when it challenges your assumptions or takes you out of your comfort zone? Pray for yourself to give the Holy Spirit more control of your practical daily life, and for sensitivity to His promptings in your daily life.