

November 24
Acts 9-12

After the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, the focus shifts back to the activities of Peter, who now is no longer confined to Jerusalem, but is instead ministering throughout the region of Judea.

The first thing that I want to notice with you is that the focus of both of these healing miracles is on the power of Jesus. He is the One who gets the glory. Peter says to Aeneas, "*Jesus Christ heals you.*" He does not want anyone to make the mistake of giving the credit to him. The credit belongs to Christ. In the case of Dorcas, he gets down on his knees and he prays - the power comes from Christ, the glory belongs to Christ.

The second thing about these two stories is that they lead up to the 'main event,' the conversion of a Roman centurion and the establishment of the first Gentile house church. It seems clear that God enabled Peter to do these miracles at this time just so that of the next action - there could be absolutely no question of the fact that Peter came at God's command, and carried divine authority for what must have seemed to some as a shocking action, even in light of the Great Commission. They remembered the Great Commission, but up to this point they had only partially acted upon it. Following immediately upon two astonishing miracles of healing that were so similar to those which Jesus Himself had performed, it would be utterly impossible to argue that Peter was not being led by the Spirit of Christ when he went to Cornelius' home in Caesarea.

Cornelius does not on his own call for the witness of Peter. He does it in response to an angelic visitor. Peter does not have to decide whether or not it is appropriate for him to go to the home of Cornelius. After three repetitions of the same vision, the servants of Cornelius arrive. Peter has no decisions to make. Even when Peter, who judiciously took some reliable witnesses with him, was preaching, God precludes the tough decisions. Peter does not have to decide how to graft the Gentiles into the church. He was convinced that God was doing that. While he was still speaking, "*The Holy Spirit came on all those who heard the message*" and just as it had been on the day of Pentecost, these Gentiles began speaking in tongues and praising God. At this momentous event, God wanted everyone to know that what happened to them was exactly the same as what happened to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, and that His relationship to these Gentile believers was identical to His relationship to the Jewish believers.

The bottom line is that "*everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name.*" And now everyone really does mean everyone - Jews, Samaritans, now Gentiles - everyone!! Whoever believes ought to be baptized as a statement of that belief and a sign that their sins have been forgiven - that was the basic message - and it is still the basic message. It centers on the person and work of Christ - who He is and what He did, and it tells people how to become a recipient of that work - by asking for forgiveness of sins and believing in Him.

It's as simple as A B C. Ask for forgiveness of your sins. Believe that, as the infinite God-man, He died to pay the penalty for your sin, and that by the resurrection from the dead, God gave proof to all who would see, that Christ's payment was sufficient and His sacrifice accepted. Then "C," confess Christ as the Lord and Master of your life (that's what baptism is all about) and live as one of Christ's disciples. Just remember A – B – C... "ask, believe and confess" and you can share your faith with others.

At the beginning of Acts chapter 12, the period of toleration ends and full-scale persecution begins again. The villain of this chapter is another of the famous (or infamous) Herod 'family of villains.'

The Herod we meet in Acts 12 is a grandson of Herod the Great. His father was called Aristobulus, but Herod the Great got angry with his son Aristobulus and had him murdered. Herod Agrippa, the son of Aristobulus and grandson of Herod the Great, is the ruler who dies in Acts 12. He has James the Apostle executed, tries to kill Peter, settles instead for killing Peter's jailers, then accepts the acclamation that he is a god. He too is a bad lot and God judges him here in chapter 12.

The Apostle James was the first of the apostles to die. As noted before, he was martyred by the wicked king, Herod Agrippa I. But in the very same chapter that James is killed, Peter is spared. Was it because Peter was more righteous than James? There is absolutely no indication of that at all. Was it because the church prayed harder for Peter? After seeing that James had been slain, I suppose that it is possible that they did, but I am certain that they also would have prayed fervently for James. The answer to that question, of course, lies in our understanding of the providence of God. He decides which of us will live long, and who will go home at an earlier time. The point we need to make is that it is up to God, and that both James who died and Peter who lived were right where God wanted them to be - right in the center of His will. Two Christians equally devout get cancer today. God heals one - the other suffers for a while and then passes into the presence of His glorious Savior. Is either less loved, less significant or less rewarded than the other? Absolutely not! About the most that we can say is that the one who is left behind, like Peter, can be sure that he still has some significant work to do.