

DISCOVERY

BIBLE STUDY COURSE

Lesson Eight: Examples of Conversion

In one's lifetime, many important questions are likely to arise.

For example: "Where should I go to school?" "What career should

I pursue?" "Whom should I marry?" "How can I earn a living?"

"Should I buy a house?"

These are important questions because the answers greatly affect one's life for many years to come. However, the most important question one can ask is, "What must I do to be saved?" The answer to this question not only affects this life, but eternity. All other questions pale in comparison. Jesus clearly teaches that our soul is worth more than all this world has to offer (Matthew 16:26). This being true, it is little wonder God chose to include very clear teaching regarding our responsibilities in respect to salvation. He does not want us to be lost (2 Peter 3:9)!

Examples are wonderful and serve a useful purpose. We hear expressions like, "A picture is worth a thousand words"; or "Don't tell me, show me." God, our Creator, knows that we learn best when clear commands are illustrated by clear

LOOKING BACK...

The Bible tells the story of God's love for us and His desire to save us from our sin...

There is objective evidence proving that the Bible is the Word of God...

God's Word is authoritative, giving spiritual direction for those desiring to serve God...

The New Covenant began with Jesus' death and teaches us what to believe and how to live...

We have all sinned and need the forgiveness offered only through Jesus' sacrifice...



examples, and God wants us to learn about the salvation available through Jesus Christ. Therefore, it is not surprising that, in respect to our salvation, God chose to include several examples illustrating how people of the first century acquired salvation from their sins.

In this study, we will briefly recap the clear teachings in Scripture that instruct us concerning salvation from sin; then we will notice several examples from the book of Acts illustrating what people of the first century did in order to receive the forgiveness of their sins. In so doing, we hope to gain a clear picture of our responsibility toward God in respect to salvation today.

➤ **Salvation Taught by Statement and Command**

God's ultimate goal for us, His creation, is salvation. He wants us to be saved from the penalty of sin and to live with Him in heaven. God is so committed to our salvation that even when we were still sinners, He allowed Jesus, His only Son, to die for us (Romans 5:8). Would God make such a sacrifice and then fail to tell us what we need to do in order to be saved? Would He leave the picture blurry? Would He make us guess as to what is expected of us? Certainly not! The Scriptures clearly teach the process by which we can receive the forgiveness of sins. Though we covered this material in the previous lesson, let us review in brief God's instructions regarding salvation from sin.

One must hear the message of good news. God's message of salvation is contained within the New Covenant and is available only to those who agree to live under its teachings. But before we can make such an agreement, we must first learn about God's New Covenant. We cannot agree to obey what we have not heard or do not understand. Paul says, "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17).

One must believe God's message of good news. Faith is a sincere conviction united with trust. We must sincerely trust in God and His ability to save the soul. The writer of Hebrews says, "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently

WHAT IS CONVERSION?

seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6). Before ascending back to heaven, Jesus commissioned His apostles to preach the gospel to the whole world. Explaining this process, He said, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16). It was for this purpose that Jesus came to earth: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

One must express his faith verbally.

Faith is an internal response to God's Word. Before one can submit to God's salvation, his faith must be made known. This is what the Bible calls "confession," and it is a necessary element in one's pursuit of salvation (Romans 10:9-10).

One must repent. Repentance is a change of mind that results in a change of life. Through reading and understanding the New Covenant, we learn about sin and its effects on the soul, and about Jesus' sacrifice to pay the penalty for our sin. We become sorrowful for the past life we have lived and decide to devote the remainder of our lives to serving God based on the teachings of the New

Conversion means "a change." God gives each of us the ability to change our hearts and lives in such a way as to be found acceptable in His sight. Indeed, this is His will for each of us. Further, He has blessed us with all the tools we need to accomplish the necessary changes: intellect, volition, conscience, and a written copy of His will. Conversion (change) takes place on three levels. First, our mind is changed and molded as we come to understand and believe God's Word (Romans 10:17; Hebrews 11:6). Second, our lives are changed as we commit ourselves to living under the guidance of God's Word. This is repentance (Acts 17:30; 2 Peter 3:9). And third, our relationship with God is changed when we submit to a spiritual cleansing (baptism) that results in God's forgiving our sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16). The stories of conversion studied in this lesson are examples of how people changed their minds, lives, and relationships with God.

Covenant. This is repentance. Paul told the Athenians, “In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30, NIV). Describing God’s love for humanity, Peter tells us that God wants everyone to repent (2 Peter 3:9).

One must be baptized. Baptism means “to dip, to immerse, to submerge.” Baptism is an act of obedience, after which God changes our spiritual standing. Baptism puts us into Christ (Galatians 3:27); it puts us into His church (1 Corinthians 12:13); it puts us into the death of Jesus (Romans 6:3) where we can be cleansed by His blood; it is a spiritual cleansing that washes away our sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16). Baptism results in a believer obtaining a new relationship with God. Where once a person was outside of Christ, he is now in Christ; where once he was outside the church, he is now in the church; where once he was separated from Jesus’ cleansing blood, he is now a recipient of its cleansing. Jesus told His disciples that believing persons were to be baptized (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:16). Peter tells us plainly that the purpose of baptism in water is to save the soul (1 Peter 3:21).

➤ **Salvation Taught by Example**

Each passage dealing with our salvation is clear—easily understood and easily obeyed. This is God’s doing. He is not trying to trick us. He is not trying to make it difficult for us to receive spiritual life. On the contrary, His desire is for every single person to be saved (2 Peter 3:9).

In addition to the clear instruction in the New Covenant regarding our salvation, God also chose to provide several examples illustrating how people of the first century obeyed these instructions. These are contained in the book of Acts. In an effort to understand better our responsibility regarding salvation, let us notice some of the more prominent examples of conversion. The student is encouraged to read each passage referenced from the book of Acts when studying the remainder of this lesson.

➤ **The Jews at Pentecost (Acts 2:37–41)**

Before ascending back to heaven, Jesus instructed His disciples to remain in Jerusalem until they had received power from the Holy Spirit, after which they were to begin preaching the good news of salvation (Acts 1:1–8). The Spirit empowered the disciples on Pentecost day (Acts 2:1–4; See *What was Pentecost* on the next page). In keeping with the Lord’s command, Peter began preaching to the Jews concerning the good news of Jesus’ ministry, death, and glorious resurrection (Acts 2:22–36).

After witnessing the power of the Holy Spirit and hearing Peter preach the good news of salvation concerning Jesus Christ, the people shouted, “What must we do?” (Acts 2:37). It is the answer to this question that we are interested in learning. What was required of these Jews in order for them to receive salvation from their sins? Let us turn to the text and read.

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.” With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day (Acts 2:37–41).

Let us summarize what the Jews at Pentecost did in order to receive salvation from sin:

They heard the gospel and believed. Peter preached to them concerning Jesus Christ, God’s agent in accomplishing salvation for man. Upon hearing this, the people were “cut to the heart” (v. 37). This is another way of saying that they were convicted and convinced by what Peter had said. Their faith is further evidenced by their question, “What must we do?”

WHAT WAS PENTECOST?

The Pentecost Festival is first described in Leviticus 23:15–21. Earlier in this chapter, God gave instruction concerning the Passover Feast, which commemorated Israel's deliverance from the Egyptians in Exodus 12. The Passover observance included a full week of celebration called the "Week of Unleavened Bread." The day following the Passover Sabbath (which would be a Sunday), the priest was to wave a sheaf of grain through the air as a sacrifice to God. Fifty days later, counting the day the wave offering was made (seven full weeks), the festival of Pentecost was to be held. "Pentecost" literally means, "fifty days."

During the Pentecost festival, many offerings were made to the Lord, both grain offerings and animal sacrifices. Specifically, Pentecost celebrated the harvest of the first of the grain crops. It was a time for the Israelites to reflect on the bountiful blessings of God, both past and present. The first and best of the crops were presented to the Lord as a token of the rich harvest they would soon receive. Later in Jewish history, Pentecost also became a commemoration of the arrival of the Law of Moses (Exodus 20).

Pentecost was an important festival for the Jews; it was one of the festivals every male Jew was expected to attend. The Pentecost recorded in Acts 2 was extra-special because several significant events occurred relative to the church.

- Just as Pentecost celebrated the harvest of the first fruits of the crops, so this Pentecost marked the first harvest of souls to the Lord—the first gospel sermon was preached and the first converts to Christianity were made.
 - The church came into existence, with those being baptized committing themselves as a body of believers to Jesus Christ and the teachings of the apostles.
 - Just as the day of Pentecost celebrated the day the Law of Moses (the Old Covenant) was given to Israel, so this Pentecost marked the day the New Covenant was given to the Israelites.
-

They repented of their sins. Since they had already evidenced their faith, Peter did not command them to have faith. Such would have been redundant. Rather, he told them what they yet lacked. He commanded them to repent. Those who obeyed the gospel did repent, and this is evidenced by the change in their lives (vv. 42–47).

They submitted to baptism. Those who believed and repented submitted to baptism, about three thousand in all (v. 41). The result was the forgiveness of sins (v. 38).

➤ **The Samaritans (Acts 8:5–13)**

In Acts 8, we read of Philip and the apostles fulfilling the Lord’s command to take the gospel message to Samaria. As he preached concerning Jesus Christ, Philip worked miracles designed to confirm his message. The people were enthralled with the miracles God was working through Philip. Simon, a local magician, had held the people spellbound for many years; but the people were able to see a difference between his sorcery and the divine miracles demonstrated by Philip. What was the result?

But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done (vv. 12–13).

Let us summarize what the Samaritans did in order to receive salvation from sin:

They heard the good news and believed. Philip preached the good news of the kingdom and Jesus Christ, and they had faith that what Philip said was true.

They submitted to baptism. Whatever Philip preached concerning Jesus, God’s kingdom, and His plan of salvation, it must have included baptism; for after Philip had preached, all the believing Samaritans were baptized.

➤ **The Man from Ethiopia (Acts 8:26–39)**

After completing his work in Samaria, Philip was called upon to meet an Ethiopian—a likely Jewish proselyte—who had just left from Jerusalem where he had worshiped God and was on his way back to Ethiopia. He was reading from Isaiah 53, a prophecy concerning Jesus. Undoubtedly, he believed in God; but as yet, he did not know about Jesus. Philip sat down in the chariot and asked the man if he understood what he was reading. He did not and invited Philip to explain the Scriptures to him (vv. 30–31).

Philip began with the Messianic prophecy in Isaiah 53 and told the Ethiopian the good news about Jesus. As they traveled along the road and came to a body of water, the Ethiopian said, “Look, here is water. Why shouldn’t I be baptized?” And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the Ethiopian went down into the water and Philip baptized him” (vv. 36b–38, NIV).

Let us summarize what the Ethiopian did in order to receive salvation from sin:

He heard the gospel and believed. The Ethiopian already believed in God and was a worshiper of Him. Therefore, Philip taught him concerning Jesus. That he had faith in what Philip preached is obvious by his response.

He submitted to baptism. Philip preached the good news about Jesus the Christ. We do not know all the words he spoke concerning Jesus, but we do know that he must have included teaching on baptism, for the man responded, “Look, here is water. Why shouldn’t I be baptized?”

➤ **Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:1–18; 22:6–16)**

Saul was a devout Jew, loyal to God and the Israelite nation. Believing that Christianity was a threat to both, he persecuted Christians unmercifully. As he journeyed from Jerusalem to Damascus to arrest and punish Christians, Jesus appeared in the form of a bright light. Jesus identified Himself, and Saul responded, “What shall I do, Lord?” (Acts 22:10). Jesus instructed him to go to Damascus, and there someone would tell him what he needed to do. Saul, blinded by the bright light, proceeded to Damascus for further instructions.

INTRODUCING SAUL

Saul was a promising young Jewish lawyer who had studied under Galatias (Acts 22:3), one of the most noted lawyers of the day. He was probably from a wealthy, upper-class family and had aspirations of becoming a powerful leader of the Jewish nation. His encounter with Jesus changed all that. God chose this man, tireless in his energy and wholly committed to his God, to be the messenger of salvation to the Gentile nations. After Jesus had clarified the mission, Paul proved to be an able and committed worker, traveling to the furthest reaches of the Roman Empire preaching the good news of salvation. Shortly after beginning his work, Saul changed his name to Paul, a Roman name that would be accepted more readily in Gentile circles. He made several successful missionary circuits, three of which are recorded in the book of Acts. Thirteen books of the New Testament were written by Paul.

Meanwhile, in a vision, the Lord spoke to Ananias, a Christian living in Damascus, a man of good report among the Jews. He commanded Ananias to go to Judas' house on Straight Street and ask for Saul (Acts 9:11). Somewhat reluctantly (fearing Saul's reputation as one who persecuted Christians), Ananias made the walk to Judas' house. Here, he found Saul praying, not having had anything to eat or drink for three days (Acts 9:9). The Scriptures record what happened next.

And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized (Acts 9:17-18).

Saul's personal account of his conversion is found in Acts 22.

Then a certain Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews who dwelt there, came to me; and he stood and said to me, "Brother Saul, receive your sight." And at that same hour I looked up at him. Then he said, "The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth. For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:12-16).

Let us summarize what Saul did in order to receive salvation from sin:

He heard the gospel. Saul was already familiar with Christianity and the gospel message. For example, he was present in Jerusalem to hear Stephen preach the gospel (Acts 7:58-8:3). It was based on his knowledge of Christianity that he persecuted Christians, believing they were in violation of Moses' Law.

He had faith in Jesus Christ. Saul's words and actions leave no doubt of his faith in Jesus. If he did not believe in Jesus, he would not have: (1) asked Jesus what he needed to do, (2) obeyed His command to go to Damascus, (3) spent three days in prayer, or (4) gone three days without eating or drinking (an obvious sign of his emotional and spiritual distress).

He repented of his past behavior. Saul's repentance is also evident. Before, he persecuted Christians; but by the time Ananias visited him, he was a changed man. He trusted in Jesus and was waiting patiently to receive the necessary knowledge of what he needed to do to be saved. The same actions that evidence his faith also evidence his repentance.

Saul submitted to baptism. By the time Ananias met Saul, he already had heard the gospel, he already had faith in Jesus, and he already had repented of his past life. All that was left for Saul to do was to be baptized for the remission of his sins. Therefore,

Ananias commanded, “Get up, be baptized, and wash your sins away” (Acts 22:16). Saul obeyed this command (Acts 9:18).

One cannot question the sincerity of Saul’s faith—he obeyed Jesus by going to Damascus, and he spent the next three days in prayer and fasting. One cannot question the authenticity of Saul’s repentance—he was a changed man who later would dedicate his life to telling others about Jesus. Yet, despite Saul’s sincere faith and repentance, Ananias told him he needed to submit to baptism before his sins could be washed away. Saul’s conversion, as much as any other in Scripture, emphasizes the importance of each aspect of the conversion process.

➤ **The Philippian Jailer (Acts 16:16–34)**

While Paul and Silas were preaching in Philippi, they were cast into prison by people who had been incited by angry slave owners. At midnight, Paul and Silas sang songs and prayed to God. Suddenly, there was a great earthquake, the prison doors were opened, and the prisoners’ chains were loosed. Roused from his sleep and seeing the prison doors standing open, the jailer drew his sword to kill himself, thinking the prisoners had fled. (According to the Roman Code of Justinian, a guard who allowed a prisoner to escape was liable to suffer the same penalty as the escapee). The Scriptures record what happened next:

But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, “Do yourself no harm, for we are all here.” Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. And he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” So they said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.” Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household (Acts 16:28–34).

Let us summarize what the jailer did in order to receive salvation from sin:

The jailer (and his family) heard the gospel message. After being escorted from the prison, Paul and Silas “spoke the word of the Lord” to the jailer and his family (v. 32).

The jailer (and his family) believed in God. When the jailer asked what he needed to do to be saved, Paul told him that he needed to have faith in Jesus Christ (v. 31). The fact that the jailer and his family did have faith is confirmed in verse 34.

The jailer repented. Repentance is not mentioned specifically; yet, it is evident that the jailer underwent a significant change of mind and behavior. Where before, he cared little for Paul and his preaching, he now listened intently and submitted to it. Where before, he helped beat Paul and held him in prison, he now took him into his own house, fed him, and washed his wounds.

The jailer (and his family) submitted to baptism (v. 33). This was the natural result of having heard and believed the message of good news.

Some have used this example of conversion in an attempt to support a belief in salvation by faith only. They point out that, when the jailer asked about the requirements for salvation, Paul simply responded, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household” (v. 31). However, it should be noted that at this time the jailer, being a Gentile, knew nothing about the God of heaven or Jesus Christ His Son. The essential need for the jailer at this point was to hear and believe the message of salvation regarding Jesus Christ. The jailer was receptive to the idea, so Paul preached the good news to the jailer and his family. We are not told the specific words Paul used, but he must have told them about faith, for they all believed (v. 34). He must have told them about repentance, for the jailer washed their wounds and fed them a meal (vv. 33–34). And he must have told them about baptism, for the jailer and his family were baptized that same night (v. 33).

➤ Conclusion

As one examines the examples of conversion in the book of Acts, a consistent pattern emerges. In each case, the individuals heard the message of salvation, believed that message, and submitted to baptism in water. Among the final instructions Jesus left His apostles before ascending to heaven were these words:

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).

God wants us to be saved—no message is clearer in the Bible. God’s desire for us to be saved is so great that He sacrificed His only Son as a sin offering on our behalf. He stands willing and able to provide the salvation we need. The question is: Do we want to be saved?

Do you want to be saved? The studies you have completed have outlined God’s plan of redemption in the Scriptures. In order to be saved from the penalty of sin (spiritual death and separation from God, Romans 6:23), you must obtain the forgiveness of your sins. This can be accomplished through a simple process of conversion (change) described in the Scriptures:

- Hear the message of the New Covenant;
- Believe the message of the New Covenant, and express your faith verbally (confession);
- Commit your life to the teachings found in the New Covenant (repentance);
- Submit to a spiritual cleansing (baptism).

By heeding these instructions (the same instructions given to people of the first century who wanted salvation from their sins), you are expressing your willingness to submit to the Lord under the teachings of His New Covenant. Consequently, He cleanses you from your sin based on the sacrifice of Jesus, saving you from sin’s penalty. At the

same time, God will add you to Jesus' body (the church) and make you a member of His family under the New Covenant.

Having learned about the New Covenant in these studies, if you believe God's message to be true and are willing to live according to its teachings, please let us assist you in baptism for the remission of your sins. We anxiously await for you to join us as a member of God's family!

Questions and Answers

1. What is the most important question a person can ask? _____

Why is it most important? _____

2. Briefly summarize the process by which a person receives salvation from God and give a Scripture reference for each phase of the process. _____

3. Who, on Pentecost day, preached the first gospel sermon? _____

4. What were the Jews at Pentecost told to do in order to receive forgiveness for their sins? _____

5. Who preached the gospel to the Samaritans? _____

6. What did the Samaritans do after hearing the gospel? _____

7. Who preached the gospel to an Ethiopian in a chariot? _____

8. What was the Ethiopian's response to hearing the good news about Jesus?

9. Who met Saul (Paul) on the road to Damascus? _____

Did this encounter result in Saul receiving the immediate forgiveness of sins?

10. What was Saul told to do in order to receive the forgiveness of sins? _____

11. Who preached the gospel to the Philippian jailer? _____

12. After hearing the gospel, what did the jailer and his family do? _____

Thought Questions

1. Why would God choose to include in the Bible examples of how people were saved in the first century? What benefit do these examples serve today?
2. In surveying the examples of conversion in the book of Acts, what pattern emerges? How does this pattern serve to accomplish change (conversion)?

Personal Questions

1. Have you heard God's message of salvation contained in the New Covenant?
2. Do you believe God can and will give you the salvation promised in the New Covenant if you are willing to comply with its terms?
3. Are you willing to confess your faith in Christ as God's means of salvation?
4. Are you willing to turn your back on sin and live in harmony with God's New Covenant?
5. Are you willing to be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of sins?

Additional Study Goals

1. Re-read each example of conversion in Acts in its entirety.
2. Associate each example of conversion with the appropriate chapter in Acts.

CHARTING THE COURSE

Do you still have questions about baptism? Would you like to learn more about what the Bible says about this Christian practice?

If so, you may request a special study that focuses on baptism as taught in the Scriptures—what it is, its purpose, and who should be baptized.