



Conversion Stories in the Book of Acts

An Adult Bible Class by Don Hooton

After His death and before He ascended into heaven itself, Jesus Christ gave disciples a charge that is designated commonly as “the great commission.” Matthew’s gospel contains the admonition to “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (28:18-20). Mark’s gospel ends: “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved” (16:15-16). And Luke’s gospel ends, “repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem” (24:47). And Luke tells Theophilus that he had recorded this “account of the things accomplished among us” (Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-2) so that he would know the exact truth about Jesus and His way. This series of lessons explores what the Bible shows are real life conversion stories in what was accomplished among the Apostles.

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Each Lesson will focus on aspects of the conversions as recorded in Scripture.

1. [3/7] The OverView and Objective
2. [3/14] The Conversion of some Jews on Pentecost (2:1-41)
3. [3/21] The Conversion of more Jews in Jerusalem (3:1-4:31)
4. [3/28] The Conversion of those Samaritans (8:4-25)
5. [4/4] The Conversions of an Ethiopian Eunuch (8:26-40)
6. [] The Conversion of Saul of Tarsus (9:1-19; 22:6-16; 26:12-18)
7. [4/11] The Conversion of Cornelius and his household (10:1-48; 11:1-18)
8. [4/18] The Conversion of some Philippians (16:14-15, 25-34)
9. [4/25] The Conversion of some Thessalonians and Bereans (17:1-4; 10-12), a ProCounselor in Paphos (13:6-12) and people in Rome (28:16-31)
10. [5/9] The Conversion of some Athenians (17:16-34)
11. [5/16] The Conversion of some Corinthians (18:1-11)
12. [5/23] The Conversion of some Ephesians (18:24-19:10)
13. [5/30] The Failed Conversions: Felix (Acts 23:10-25) and Agrippa (26:1-29)

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Lesson 1 (3/7/2021)

The Overview and Objective



After His death and before He ascended into heaven itself, Jesus Christ gave disciples a charge that is designated commonly as “the great commission.” Matthew’s gospel contains the admonition to “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (28:18-20). Mark’s gospel ends: “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved” (16:15-16). And Luke’s gospel ends, “repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem” (24:47). And Luke tells Theophilus that he had recorded this “account of the things accomplished among us” (Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-2) so that he would know the exact truth about Jesus and His way.

This series of lessons explores what the Bible shows are real life conversion stories in what was accomplished among the Apostles. The actual term for “conversion” (Gr. *epistrephei*) and its more common verb “to turn” (Gr. *epistrepho*) appears a total of twelve times in the Book of Acts (3.19, 9.35, 40, 11.21, 14.15, 15.3 [noun], 19, 36, 16.18, 26.18, 20, 28.27). Except for three instances (9.40, 15.36, and 16.18), the terms are exclusively used with reference to people turning to God in response to the Gospel. These verses show that people who were converted were repenting and turning (3.19; 14.15; 26.20), “turn[ing] to the Lord” (11.21), were seeking redemption (9.35; 15.3, 19; 26.18; 28.27) and had faith in Christ (26.18). Conversion is, therefore, a process where belief leads you to something God has presented in the message of the gospel. And in these lessons, we will learn what that really is.

Each lesson will also try to understand the people, their backgrounds and the reason the gospel was believed by them. It is true to say that they believed, they repented and they were baptized and this is precisely what was being accomplished among the disciples just as Luke wrote to Theophilus. However, the succeeding lessons will cover not merely what all of them had in common – but rather what made each of them different and compelling. It seems to me that the story Luke tells was intended to make the reader think about these unique aspects.

Still, it is important – even critical – in today’s pluralism in “Christianity” to see the consistency in the record that Luke wrote to Theophilus. It was, he said, the “exact truth” (Luke 1:4, NASB) that had been taught “so that you may have certainty” (ESV) or “know the certainty” (NKJV, CSB, NIV, HCSB). So Luke’s record of not merely the life of Jesus in the gospel – but his continued work to Theophilus in Acts was to help him know not just what he had been taught but that what he was taught was accurate.

The people were all different. Some were Jews; some were Jewish leaders; Some were followers of John; Some were soldiers; Some were businesswomen; Some were leaders in synagogues and others were pagan worshippers or idols. Yet all of them heard the same message and responded to the gospel with extraordinary consistency.

Further, the book of Acts also shows failures in the efforts of sharing the gospel. There was the failed attempt to convert Felix (Acts 23:10-25) and Agrippa (26:1-29) but as the gospel messages keeps being spoke, people keep believing.

In this lesson we want to trace with the chart on the next page what either was said by proclaimers or what was done by listeners (in Luke’s own words) in order for them to be saved by the gospel of Jesus.

Read through each of the Scripture Narratives and check the appropriate box for what either the presenter of the message said *should be done* or what is said *that the listener did* in order to be saved.

	Hear	Repent	Confess	Be Baptized	Significant Beliefs or Backgrounds	Approaches the Teacher Used
conversions						
Jews on Pentecost (2:1-41)						
Jews on Solomon's Porch (3:1-4:4)						
Samaritans (8:4-25)						
Ethiopian (8:26-40)						
Saul of Tarsus (9:1-19; 22:6-16; 26:12-18)						
Lydia (16:14-15)						
The Jailer (16:25-34)						
Thessalonians (17:1-4)						
The Bereans (17:10-12)						
ProCounselor Sergius Paulus (13:6-12)						
The Athenians (17:16-34)						
The Corinthians (18:1-11)						
Apollos and the Ephesians (18:24-19:10)						
Jews and Greeks in Rome (28:16-31)						
non-conversions						
Felix (Acts 23:10-25)						
Agrippa (26:1-29)						

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Lesson 2 (3/14/2021)

The Conversion of some Jews on Pentecost (2:1-41)

The Day of Pentecost was the first day the gospel was proclaimed after Jesus had completed the purpose of God as Messiah and received from the Father the promises the Spirit had made accomplished when He sat down at the right hand of God and sent the Spirit as Peter described. It was an amazing day as it marked the beginning of the church that Jesus established.

On the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came and filled the apostles in a spectacular display. There was a great rushing sound and tongues of fire came and sat upon each apostle. They began to speak to a crowd filled with people who spoke many different languages, and every person heard the apostle's words in their own native language. The crowd was amazed, and some wondered what this meant while others said the apostles must be drunk. It was then that Peter began preaching the very first sermon about Jesus. Peter began his lesson by assuring the crowd that the apostles were not drunk as it was around 9:00 in the morning. Instead, he told them, this was the fulfillment of the prophecy found in Joel 2:28-32. Peter also reminded them that they had seen in Jesus what God had worked through Him: wonders and signs. Yet, they crucified and killed Him. God then raised Jesus from the dead because, as Peter said, death could not hold Jesus. Peter closed this first sermon with a very powerful declaration: You crucified this Jesus God has made both Lord and Christ (2:36).

The people who were gathered there, in the temple courtyard (2:1,46), would become believers that very moment and ask, "What shall we do?" (Acts 2:37) and Peter answered, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you for the forgiveness of your sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (2:38).

It's important to note that only 3,000 (men, c.f. 2:41; 4:4) were converted at this sermon. Yes, there were women who were not numbered. But while six to ten thousand in a day's work sounds staggering, there were, according to Josephus somewhere to around 3,000,000 worshippers (Jos., Wars, 2:280). So less than 1% (of the men) were converted.

But who were these people?

1. **They were "living" in Jerusalem.** Normally, this would refer to permanent residents like we would say (1:19) but based on the usage here, Luke shows them as "residing in Jerusalem" but they had come from "every nation under heaven" (2:5); even as far as Rome (which would be over 1500 miles or a 70+ days' journey by 8 hours a day on foot.) It's reasonable to believe they made this trip to include both feasts and took up residence in Jerusalem in between the festivals of Passover and Pentecost.
2. **They were devout men** (2:5). That would suggest, by Luke's use of this word, that they were cautious and concerned about pleasing God and careful to observe His covenant laws for them in the Law of Moses. Of course, that is manifested that they had travelled thousands of miles to attend these feast(s) in Jerusalem. But it is manifest in that they are at the Temple on Pentecost.

3. **They sought answers (2:12).** They wanted to understand what it meant that they could hear wind but not see it, see fiery manifestations on the Apostles' heads, and then hear common Jews speak in the language they knew in the land that was their home (2:6-13).
4. **They listened with their heart (2:37).** Who listens to accusations of murdering an innocent man? Of being part of a mob attack that led to the crucifixion of Israel's King? People with a heart to listen.
5. **They loved truth.** They were a people ready to abandon the falsehoods the religious leaders had purported about Jesus and they listened.

Questions:

1. What would have been the thing they all shared in common at that moment on Pentecost as Jews?
 - a. In the religion that they practiced at the moment?
 - b. In the things they heard about Jesus?
 - c. And perhaps, what they had witnessed at Passover in Jerusalem?
2. What was unique about the scene they were now witnessing?
3. How did Peter approach them? (Was it subtle, harsh, truthful, sarcastic, condescending, heartfelt?).
4. How did Peter address their behavior? How else could he have said it?
5. What made them want to do something (2:36)?
6. What did Peter tell them to do and what to expect (2:38-29)?
7. What was the result of their actions (2:47)?