

Two Year Bible Trek  
Week 88  
Acts 9-15:35

**Key Concepts:** The key concept in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles is that the Holy Spirit works through the Apostles to create a renewed community of faith based on the reality of Jesus of Nazareth as the long awaited savior of Israel and the world.

**Central Concepts:** The central concept in this section concerns the place and participation of the Gentiles (non-Jews) in the life and work of the church. As we saw in the previous section of Acts the early church was comprised solely of Jewish believers. This made sense since Jesus was a Jew as were all of his early followers. As the church began to grow, however, it encountered more and more Gentiles. The church struggled with how these non-Jews could be incorporated into the life and work of God's people. We will read about the church and its leadership wrestling with this issue.

**Brief Summary: Saul's Conversion (9:1-35)** Saul was a Pharisee who was actively persecuting the followers of Jesus. He intended to arrest and perhaps execute them all. As he was headed toward Damascus, he is thrown to the ground and is blinded by a bright light. He then hears the voice of Jesus who tells him to go into Damascus and wait. While Saul is there, God calls a man named Ananias to go and witness to Saul. Saul believes, is filled with the Spirit and is baptized. He immediately witnesses to Jesus as the messiah but then has to flee for his life. He meets Barnabas who sends Saul to Tarsus for his own safety. We temporarily lose track of Saul/Paul until a bit later in the story.

**Peter and the Gentiles (9:36-11:18)** We return to Peter and his work. The first short story is a miraculous healing by Peter of a woman named Dorcas. This event then leads us into one of the most significant events in Acts. We are introduced to a Roman Centurion named Cornelius, who was a friend of the Jews. He is given a vision from God that someone named Simon Peter had a message for him. Cornelius was then told that he could find Peter in Joppa. Meanwhile Peter is praying and in a trance is given a vision of God telling him to eat ritually unclean food. Peter refuses, but God insists and declares that all foods are now ritually clean. This happens three times. Cornelius' servants find Peter and bring him to the Centurion. Peter witnesses about Jesus, realizes that God is inviting the Gentiles into the church, the Holy Spirit descends on everyone in the room and they are all baptized. Thus the church is now a mixture of Jews and Gentiles.

**The Church is Transformed (11:19-15:35)** – Two factors work together to transform the church. The first is persecution. Following the stoning of Stephen, the church faced persecution by some of the Jewish leadership and Rome. What this meant for the church was that Jesus' followers moved from place to place, and in so doing they taught people about Jesus and thus created new churches. It was in Antioch that Jesus' followers were first called Christians. The second factor is the inclusion of Gentiles. This creates a great deal of controversy which is mostly settled at the Council of Jerusalem (around 50 CE) where Gentiles are allowed into the church but do not have to follow the Jewish purity Laws.

This section of the book also includes Paul's first missionary journey (12:25-13:12). Paul travels with Barnabas to Cyprus, Antioch of Pisidia and Iconium. They witness to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and what those events mean for all people; forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

1. What do you make of Saul/Paul's conversion?
2. How does Peter's vision help you understand why we Gentiles do not need to follow all of the Jewish dietary laws?
3. Where do you see the church being persecuted today?