

## The Book of Acts Study Guide

### Chapters 9-10

#### 9:1-18

Saul was very aggressive in seeking to destroy the Messianic community and expanded his search beyond Jerusalem to Damascus.

v. 2 – Messianic believers are identified as The Way. This is the first time a name has been adopted by believers for themselves, and it will be used a number of times throughout Acts. They were not considered to be followers of a new religion, but just another sect of Judaism. There are important implications to their use of this term, “The Way.”

- Because it is “the way,” not “a way,” it communicates that is the only way of faith that is valid. As Yeshua declared: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me” (Jn 14:6).
- The way implies a defined path, not a random field. In that regard, Yeshua observed: “For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it” (Mat 7:14).
- The Hebrew equivalent of the Greek word *hodos*, translated as “way” is *derech*, from which we get the English word “direction.” In our contemporary culture, there are road signs or trail signs to keep you going in the right direction. The same concept is evident in the life of the believer, and this is where the Torah comes in. Moses said regarding the Torah:

So you shall observe to do just as Adonai your God has commanded you; you shall not turn aside to the right or to the left. You shall walk in all the way which Adonai your God has commanded you, that you may live, and that it may be well with you. . . (Deut 5:32-33)

In similar fashion, Psalm 119:33 states: “Teach me, O LORD, the way of Your statutes, and I shall observe it to the end.” We also know that Yeshua taught how to live out the commandments in a pure manner, especially emphasizing the importance of loving God and loving your neighbor.

So the term, The Way, implies much more than a simplistic name. There are not many implications if you identify yourself as a Christian today, because that term means many things to different people. But “the Way” is very rich in meaning when you consider it in the greater context of Scripture.

v. 3 – Yeshua spoke directly to Saul from heaven, just as the Father spoke from heaven at the baptism/immersion of Yeshua (Mat 3:17), at the transfiguration of Yeshua (Mat 17:5), and when Yeshua called for the Father to be glorified (Jn 12:28).

The salvation of Saul is unique in that it involves a direct intervention by Yeshua and was not preceded by witnessing by other believers, as is normally the case. But his heart was so hardened that normal rational thought would not have led Saul to believe and repent. For that reason it seems that God chose to work in this particular manner with Saul.

v. 4 – Saul never had an opportunity to persecute Yeshua in person, But Yeshua could affirm

that Saul was persecuting Him because Yeshua is the head of the body of believers and thus feels every kind of harm that is done to the body. It is a direct reflection of Yeshua's words: "Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me" (Mat 25:40).

- v. 10 – Saul was blinded by the light and was taken to Damascus. There, God raised up Ananias to restore his sight. This passage informs us that in this occurrence of miraculous healing, God was the initiator and the one who empowered it. It was also purposeful—it would enable Saul to carry out God's calling to take the Good News to Gentiles, kings and Jews (v. 15).
- vv. 13-14 – When God called Ananias to minister to Saul, he was hesitant to do so because of Saul's reputation. So we can probably assume that the only prayers being said by believers in those days was for relief from his persecution, not for him to be saved. That is a reminder to us about our need for faithfulness and trusting in God for the impossible if it is within His will.
- vv. 17-18 – Saul believed in Yeshua, was filled with the Holy Spirit and healed from His blindness, and then was baptized.

### 9:19-31

Saul spent time with disciples of Yeshua living in Damascus, and while it is not directly stated, it seems reasonable to assume that they taught him what he needed to know about Yeshua, because he began preaching the Good News the Messiah right away (v. 20). But that is consistent with his personality—having total zeal for what he believed, previously in a harmful way, and now in a way that contributes to the kingdom of God.

- v. 22 – He was increasing in strength, which is a reflection on the knowledge he was gaining for debate. This preparation period is described as lasting "many days" (v. 23), which is a Hebraic way of saying, "a really long time." Galatians 1:17-18 tells us that it lasted three years altogether. Here in Acts we learn that during this time he became very accomplished in "confounding" non-believing Jews. In the subsequent verses we are shown how groups of people reacted differently to his change in behavior.
- vv. 23-24 – The non-believing Jews of Damascus wanted to kill him because they couldn't defeat the case he was making about Yeshua being the Messiah. Their reaction was similar to the way the leaders of Judaism in Jerusalem killed Stephen when they could not refute his arguments regarding Yeshua.
- vv. 26-27 – The disciples in Jerusalem did not believe he had become one of them. They didn't want to kill him, but they did not want to have anything to do with him at that time. It is only when Barnabbas intervened that the leaders agreed to meet with Saul.
- vv. 29-30 – Paul argued with Hellenistic Jews in Jerusalem and that caused more of an uproar. So the leaders of the believing community sent him away to Caesarea where he could board a ship to his birthplace of Tarsus in present-day Turkey (22:3).
- v. 31 – Peace was then restored among the believing community that had spread to Judea, the Galilee and Samaria. A general principle can be derived from this situation regarding congregational management—our behavior is important, and sometimes leaders need to step in by asking a disruptive person to withdraw in order to preserve peace within the body.

9:32-43

The focus then shifts to Peter. He traveled to the Mediterranean coast and first visited believers in Lydda (called Lod in Hebrew), which is about two miles from the location of the Ben Gurion airport in Israel today. There he healed a paralyzed Jewish man named Aeneas and many Jews in the area became believers in Yeshua (vv. 34-35). Once again Peter was acting under the authority that the Apostles had been uniquely given by Yeshua enabling them to heal every kind of disease and sickness (Mat 10:1).

Word of Peter's presence in the area reached other disciples in Joppa (Jaffa, Yafo) a few miles away in the vicinity right next to modern-day Tel Aviv. A beloved Jewish woman named Tabitha (whose Hebrew name and her Greek name, Dorcas, both meant "Gazelle") had died after a sickness, and the believers there asked Peter to come (v. 38). Until this point, the Apostles had never raised anyone from the dead. Yeshua alone had done that with the daughter of Jairus (Lk 8:41-42,49-56) and Lazarus (Jn 11:1-44). Yeshua had never stated specifically that they would be able to raise the dead. But Peter would have the confidence that he could do the same because the Apostles had been doing virtually the same miraculous works of healing and casting out demons that Yeshua had done. So it would be a step of faith to attempt the only other miraculous act remaining. And they did indeed have authority to heal "every disease and sickness," and she had died from a sickness, so raising her from the dead would also entail a healing from her ailment. Peter successfully brought her back to life, but unlike the manner of healers today, he did so without public spectacle, and only after praying in a humble manner before her (v. 40).

v. 43 – When it was all over, he stayed at the home of Simon the tanner.

All of these events were preparing Peter for what would come in the next chapter. He left the intense religious environment of Jerusalem that was continually dealing with applications of Torah that tended toward legalism and rabbinic burdens. And now that he was outside of that environment, he was confronting a specific issue of the Torah, namely that of ritual uncleanness. This leads us to consider the issue of how uncleanness relates to the prior events involving resurrection from the dead.

In the case of the daughter of Jairus, Yeshua never entered the room where the dead body of the girl was laying and He also never entered the tomb of Lazarus. That means that He never became ritually unclean. But Peter was in the room with the woman when she was dead, so he became unclean for seven days and could not go back to the temple in Jerusalem during that time (Num 19:14).

Peter staying in the home of Simon the Tanner is likewise significant. A tanner was someone who worked with the hides of animals in order to make leather. That meant he was continually in contact with dead animals, which made him highly vulnerable to ritual uncleanness (Lev 7:21; 11:4-31). So Peter was not just considered to be ritually unclean at that moment because of being in a room with a dead person a short time earlier, but he was now staying in a home that was unclean (Lev 11:32-38, 41-44) and living with a man that was likely unclean. In light of these matters, it is clear that God was preparing Peter to deal with the greatest issue of uncleanness in that day—Gentiles.

10:1-8

The scene shifts up the coast to Caesarea, to the home of Cornelius who was a God-Fearer, meaning he was a Gentile who believed in the God of Israel, but had not gone through formal

conversion to Judaism. Not only did his prayers reach God, but his alms (charitable giving) “ascended as a memorial before God.” Thus Cornelius was an exemplary person to represent God’s pleasure in reaching the Gentiles with the Good News of Salvation in Yeshua.

### 10:9-17

Meanwhile Peter was on the roof praying when he had a vision of all kinds of animals on a sheet, which means it included those that were unclean or not kosher (“fit”) to eat. He was told by a (heavenly) voice to kill and eat those animals. But he refused to do so because he had always obeyed God’s commandments in the Torah not eat such animals. The voice then declared, “What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy” (v. 15). And to make sure that he saw and heard what was being communicated, the vision was done a total of three times.

v. 17 – Naturally Peter was perplexed by this vision and was no doubt trying to figure it out. It is reasonable to think that he was wondering if God had suddenly changed His mind about the dietary laws and they were no longer valid.

### 10:17-43

The representatives of Cornelius found Peter and together they all headed to Caesarea. Upon arrival, Cornelius treated Peter in a worshipful manner, but Peter made it clear that he should be treated like any other man (v. 26). This occurrence illustrates the importance of not putting leaders on a pedestal and leaders should not let other people treat them like stars. Pride is a sin that can easily find its way into the lives of believers and Peter’s example is a reminder that we all need to resist it.

Peter acknowledges that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with a Gentile (v. 28). The key to the discussion that follows is understanding Peter’s use of the word “unlawful” and what that has to do with the two visions experienced in this chapter. Is it the Law found in the Torah or something else?

In order to understand the nature of ritual cleanness and the dietary laws we have to consider what is written in the Torah. Leviticus 20:22-26 shows that the issue of holiness is based on separation, and that there are things in this world that are pure and acceptable to God, and things that are not. He desires that we maintain true holiness in our lives, which requires separation from those things that are not acceptable to Him. In this passage God identified nations that had practices that He abhors, and thus Israel, His chosen people, were called not to act like them. Thus God established a manner in which they could demonstrate their commitment to holiness, By refraining from eating certain foods—keeping kosher—they could show their acceptance of His authority, based on His terms for what is acceptable and unacceptable.

But God’s warning was about not acting like other ungodly nations. It was not about associating with Gentiles in any way by being in the same home or eating a meal together. Yet that is how this aspect of the Torah evolved over time as the elders of Israel tightened the principle and codified it with additional restrictions, ultimately reaching the conclusion that Gentiles as a whole were unclean and thus had to be avoided entirely, even though the Torah itself never made that prohibition. So when Peter said it was “unlawful” for him to associate with a Gentile, it was a reference to the rabbinic law, not the actual law or Torah of Moses.

And this illustrates the fact that it is easy to develop false doctrines when you rationalize things beyond the actual commandments of God. And you can also see how Peter continued to be influenced by this rabbinic error even after being genuinely redeemed and mature in His faith.

This passage should lead us to ask ourselves if there are any things that have crept into our walk of faith that are man-made traditions, not the pure message of God. It can be a very painful experience for us personally because we hold on to traditions tightly and we value them. But the example of Peter is that when we are accurately informed of the actual truth of the matter, we ought to release them and carry on in faithfulness to what we learn to be true. And so that is what Peter does by declaring “God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean” (v. 28).

Cornelius retold his vision to Peter in verses 30-33. Peter responded by showing how clearly he then understood what God was communicating in this complex process, namely that all people are welcome to God if they fear Him, just like Cornelius (vv. 34-35).

In light of the context of this chapter, we can see that Peter’s vision was not actually dealing with the dietary laws of the Torah. Moreover, there is no evidence in Scripture of any believers, including Peter, ever ceasing to eat in a kosher manner. So this passage is consistent with Yeshua’s declaration: “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill” (Mat 5:17).

This passage is a reminder to us of the importance of reading God’s Word in context, and not drawing conclusions that are based on a failure to do so. In this case, the passage is not communicating a principle regarding food, but is about people. And in particular, it not only corrects a commonly held false understanding of a biblical principle in second temple times, but it gave an unmistakable exhortation to the believing community to take the Good News to people who previously had not been considered worthy of the message and the salvation it brings.

- vv. 36-43 – Once he had gained this understanding, Peter immediately entered that calling by giving a testimony about the person, works and message of Yeshua, culminating with a clear statement that whoever “believes in Him has received the forgiveness of sins.”
- v. 44 – It is apparent that everyone who heard that message for the first time believed it and the Holy Spirit came upon them, which is an indication they were saved at that moment. This would include Cornelius. This act has significance because even though he was called a God-fearer and one who prayed and gave alms at the beginning of this chapter, his righteous works were insufficient to save him. If it was possible to be saved by being religious or doing good works, Peter would not have been needed to visit his home and preach the Good News. So Cornelius became a member of the believing community like anyone else—through faith in Yeshua.
- vv. 45-48 – Then for the first time, we read about Gentiles participating in the ordinances and the fellowship of the believing community.