

The Acts and Torah of the Apostles Study Guide

Chapter 9

9:1-18

Saul¹ 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 also implies a defined path to follow, 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 *derek*, 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), and 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.

¹ Saul is not described as using his Roman name, Paul, until Acts 13:9 when he was at Cyprus.

- v. 4-5 – 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. 8-10 – After being blinded by the light, Saul 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).
- v. 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.
- v. 17-18 – We are told that when Saul believed in Yeshua, he was immediately filled with the Holy Spirit and healed from His blindness, and then was baptized. But he was just getting started with his own journey on the Way that previously he had tried to destroy.

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—with total zeal for what he believed, previously in a harmful way, and then in a positive way that contributed to the kingdom of God.

- v. 22 – He was increasing in strength, which is a reflection on the knowledge he was gaining for debate.

Luke left out one detail that occurred between verses 22-23 of Acts 9. But Paul describes it in Galatians 1:17, namely that he went to Arabia. There, he does not say where he went in Arabia. But it is reasonable to conclude that it was in territory that belonged to the Nabatean Kingdom, which was directly south of Damascus. And that very well might have meant that he spent time in Petra, the Nabatean capital. It is likely that Saul spent his time there witnessing about Yeshua. Afterward, he returned to Damascus. And then, after a total of three years, he went to Jerusalem for the first time after becoming a believer in Yeshua and a follower of the Way.

- v. 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. But God used that hostility to lead Saul to Jerusalem for the first time after becoming a believer in Yeshua and a follower of the Way. Altogether, according to Galatians 1:17, he was away from Jerusalem for three years.
- v. 26-27 – Upon his arrival, 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 Barnabas intervened that the leaders agreed to meet with Saul.

- v. 29-30 – Saul 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 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 women 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 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).

The fact that Peter stayed 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 who was likely unclean. In light of these matters, it is clear that God was preparing Peter to deal with the greatest perceived issue of uncleanness in that day—Gentiles.