

Two Concerns

We have noticed that Saul and Cornelius were different in many ways but needed to hear the gospel's truth and obey it. Those that witnessed the two events testified that Saul changed and that gentiles are allowed into the family of God. People that did not see the events questioned the truthfulness of the things said about them. Many were still afraid of Saul. Certain of the Jews demanded that some customs of the Law of Moses be maintained. Doubts and traditions caused conflicts that lasted for several decades.

Luke writes that Saul *"Kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this Jesus is the Christ"* (Acts 9:22). Since travelers spread stories as they went from place-to-place, the description of Saul's conversion must have reached Jerusalem. However, *"When he came to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple"* (Acts 9:26). The disciple Barnabas, who earlier sold his property and donated the proceeds to help the needy, took control of Saul, interceding for him with the apostles. The two primary points discussed seem to be the appearance of Jesus to Saul and his ability to preach Jesus in Damascus boldly. Saul was then able to move freely with the brethren, talk to, and argue with the Hellenistic Jews about Jesus. Just as the Jews in Damascus tried to kill Saul for preaching Jesus (Acts 9:23-25), the Hellenistic Jews in Jerusalem plotted to kill him (Acts 9:29-32). When beliefs do not stand against the truth, the action seems to be to kill the messenger. Note that Jesus told Saul, *"It is hard for you to kick against the goads"* (Acts 26:14). Falsehood cannot win against the truth.

The disciples in Damascus got Saul out of the city to protect him (Acts 9:23-25). The disciples in Jerusalem also sent Saul on his way when they learned of a plot to kill him. *"They brought him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus"* (Acts 9:30). *"So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase"* (Acts 9:31).

When Saul returned to Jerusalem, the disciples feared him. When Peter returned to Jerusalem, the people challenged what he had done. He found that stories had spread, probably as they do today, with some truth and some error mixed in. *"Now the apostles and the brethren who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those who were circumcised took issue with him"* (Acts 11:1-2). The main fault seems to be in the covenant sign given to Abraham and his descendants and not the doctrinal truth that the promise is also to *"all them that are far off,"* (Acts 2:39). The charge made against Peter was, *"You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them"* (Acts 11:3). Vincent says, "Men uncircumcised (ἄνδρες ἀκροβυστίαν ἔχοντες) is an indignant expression. See Ephesians 2:11." We might even say this is a racist reference about those outside the family of Abraham's descendants.

Peter explained the vision and command that preceded the journey emphasizing the main points. Peter said he objected to the things in the sheet, but *"A voice from heaven answered ... 'What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy. This happened three times'"* (Acts 11:9-10). Concerning the three men from Caesarea, Peter said, *"The Spirit told me to go with them without misgivings"* (Acts 11:11-12). A vision repeated three times for emphasis, followed by a direct command, could only be obeyed. Peter also took six witnesses that could provide their testimony to those in Jerusalem.

Peter discussed the story told by Cornelius of the angel's visit and his teaching about Jesus. Peter told the Jews that while preaching with authority about Jesus, *"The Holy Spirit fell upon them just as He did upon us at the beginning"* (Acts 11:15). Of the many things going through his mind at the time, Peter remembered the Lord said, *"John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit"* (Acts 11:16). His conclusion was simple. *"Therefore if God gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?"* (Acts 11:17). After listening to Peter and the witnesses, the Jews stopped arguing, at least for a while. They concluded, *"God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life"* (Acts 11:18). Later, we find Jews teaching the need for Gentiles to be circumcised. Those Jews caused another problem for the church by teaching that Gentiles must be circumcised to be acceptable to God

In all disputes over beliefs and actions, there is only one truth. What the majority believes, or what a single, very knowledgeable person believes, means nothing. The only truth is the Word of God, given to His son and presented to us by the Holy Spirit. It should silence men's thoughts and speeches as it did in Jerusalem (Acts 11:18).