

Eight Conversion Stories in Acts

There are more than eight Acts stories of people coming to Christ, but these eight provide details in a way that separates them from one-line summaries of many believing. Our *particular* interest: what is the Holy Spirit's role in these stories? Our *wider* interest: what are the basics of coming to faith in Christ? All of us who follow the Lord have a story. These give us our basic plot.

The 3,000 Acts 2:26-47. *Message*: God made Jesus Lord and Christ. Repent, be baptized, receive forgiveness and Holy Spirit. *Response*: Those who accepted were baptized. *Changed life / evidence*: they listened to the apostles, met together, ate and praised together, shared possessions. [No mention of Spirit in *response* or *change*.]

Samaritans Ac 8:5-24. *Stage one. Message*: proclaimed Christ. *Response*: believed and were baptized. *Result*: great joy. *Stage two*: apostles told that Samaritans believed, they came and prayed that Spirit would come, laid hands on them, Samaritans received Spirit. *Change [this time none]*: Simon offered money for this Spirit ability, was severely warned.

Ethiopian Eunuch Ac 8:34-39. *Message*: good news about Jesus. *Response*: baptism. *Changed life / evidence*: eunuch went home rejoicing. [No mention of Holy Spirit.]

Saul/Paul Ac 9:3-20; 22:6-16. *Stage one. Message*: Why are you persecuting me? I am Jesus. *Response*: What shall I do, Lord? *Change/evidence*: Paul went obediently to Damascus. *Stage two. Message*: [Ananias prayed for Spirit filling] be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name. *Response*: healing from blindness and baptism. *Change/evidence*: At once Paul began to preach that Jesus is the Son of God.

Cornelius and Household Ac 10:42-48. *Message*: God made Jesus judge of living and dead, whoever believes receives forgiveness. *Change (1)*: Holy Spirit came, all spoke in tongues and praised God. *Response*: Peter baptized them all. *Change (2)*: They asked him to stay a few days.

Lydia & Household Ac 16:13-15. *Message*: [Paul spoke] *Response*: the Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. All baptized. *Change*: stay at my house. [No mention of Holy Spirit.]

Jailer & Household Ac 16:29-34. *Message*: believe in the Lord Jesus. *Change/evidence (1)*: Jailer washed their wounds (Paul and Silas). *Response*: Jailer and household baptized. *Change/evidence (2)*: Jailer gave them a meal, filled with joy. [No mention of Holy Spirit]

John the Baptist's Disciples Ac 19:1-7. *Problem*: These disciples never heard of the Holy Spirit. *Question*: which baptism? *Answer*: John's. *Message*: John told people to believe in Jesus. *Response*: baptized in the name of Jesus. *Change/evidence*: [laying on of hands] Holy Spirit came, spoke in tongues and prophesied.

Observations: Only **two** constants: one, **the message: always about Jesus [not the Spirit]**. In the case of Lydia we are told only “Paul’s message,” but we’ve had messages from him before, and it is always Christ. Two, **baptism [no exceptions]**. Nothing indicates baptism is for those watching; there are private baptisms. It seems vital before God. “Be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on the Lord.”

*Hospitality or sharing possessions* is the next: four times (3,000, Cornelius, Lydia, Jailer).

*Holy Spirit* not mentioned in either the *response* or *result* in five of eight. Laying on of hands occurs three times (Paul, Samaritans, John’s disciples). *Tongues* are mentioned three times (the apostles in Acts 2 [not the 3,000]; Cornelius, John’s disciples).

*Forgiveness of sins* mentioned three times (3,000; Cornelius, Ananias to Paul). *Faith* mentioned four times (Samaritans, Cornelius, Jailer, John’s disciples).

In one case someone believed and was baptized, but it is not certain this was real (Simon in Samaria). In one case the response was evangelism (Paul).

In two cases, the Samaritans and Paul, coming to Christ takes place in two stages, over three or four days. In both cases, both stages seem essential. The complete package of coming to Christ takes place over a few days. Acts seems entirely comfortable with this.

Is Acts teaching THE NEED FOR a second experience of the Holy Spirit? Three texts are taken to teach this, but probably do not, see below. This in no way denies that the Spirit gives some believers one or more profound experiences well after coming to Christ, possibly including tongues. The Spirit goes where it wants and does what it wants. But, as Paul writes in 2 Cor, “In Christ all God’s promises are ‘Yes’.” Faith in Christ opens all God’s doors to us. Rest of NT knows no *need* for second experience.

The apostles in Acts 2 certainly had a second experience. But Pentecost was unique, the day Ezekiel, Joel, and John the Baptist predicted, the day Jesus kept his promise to send the Spirit. The Holy Spirit expressions can reoccur, but that day is not repeatable. The Spirit came on that day and stayed.

Samaritans in Acts 8. Acts 8 makes two things clear in that story: 1, the apostles went to Samaria because Samaritans believed, not because of a Spirit problem; 2, the Holy Spirit normally came when people were baptized, but not this time. The delayed Spirit (3-4 days) built unity between apostles and Samaritans. Paul’s conversion also took place over 3 days, but the second stage is not an experience after conversion.

In Acts 19, the disciples Paul meets have not heard of the Holy Spirit. BUT: They have neither believed in Jesus nor had Christian baptism. They receive the Spirit the same day they believe in Christ and are baptized. This episode has least claim to be a second experience.

Is “the gift of the Holy Spirit” that Peter offers (2:38) the gift of tongues? Possibly, probably not. The sermon Peter just finished mentioned *prophecy* twice, not *tongues* at all. If a Spirit gift, likely prophecy. The word for “gift” is not *charisma*, the word Paul always uses for spiritual gifts. This word not used elsewhere in NT for spiritual gifts. More importantly, Acts never calls tongues or prophecy or healing “gifts” by any word at all. They are simply things the Spirit does. But Acts does speak of God “giving” the Spirit in 5:32 and 15:8. That is probably what Peter means: the gift which is the Holy Spirit.