

Cases Of Non-Conversion

Introduction. We've recently examined what people in the book of Acts did to be saved. Once you count groups and individuals, there are nine examples of obedience to the gospel, establishing precisely what we need to do to be saved.

But why do some not obey the gospel? Why are certain ones not converted? Is it due to a deficiency in the message, the messenger, or the hearer? We're going to look at cases of non-conversion in the book of Acts, first among the Jews, and then among the Gentiles, noting the similarities and differences in each.

God's word does not return to Him void, but accomplishes the purpose for which it was sent (Isaiah 55:10-11). Though faith comes by hearing the word of Christ, not all heed the good news (Romans 10:14-21).

I. Unbelief Among The Jews

A. The Jewish Sanhedrin.

1. Dismissive of the evidence, the Jewish Sanhedrin rejected the truth and resorted to threats. The lame man stood before them whole; they could not deny that a noteworthy miracle had occurred.
2. Yet, they commanded the apostles not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:13-18; 5:12-16, 27-29, 40-42).

B. The Synagogue of the Freeman.

1. Unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking, men from the Synagogue of the Freedmen falsely accused Stephen and dragged him before the Council (Acts 6:8-15). In his defense, Stephen charged his accusers with presently repeating Israel's past rebellion (Acts 7:51-53).
2. Their shameful response confirmed their guilt: being cut to the quick (not to repentance but in murderous mutiny against Stephen's inspired message), they began gnashing their teeth at him; covering their ears, they rushed at him with one impulse, summarily stoning him to death (Acts 7:54-60).

C. The Jews of Damascus.

1. After his conversion, Paul preached in the synagogues, confounding the Jews who lived in Damascus, proving that Jesus is the Christ.
2. Instead of being persuaded, i.e. drawn to the logical conclusion of faith in consideration of the evidence, Paul's countrymen plotted his death (Acts 9:19-25).

D. The Jews at Pisidian Antioch.

1. Filled with jealousy at the effectiveness of Paul's ministry, the Jews of Pisidian Antioch contradicted what was spoken and blasphemed.
2. Opposing the word of God, they demonstrated an obstinate and argumentative spirit. Speaking in a disrespectful and denigrating manner, they slanderously reviled both the message and messenger (Acts 13:42-47).

E. The Jews at Iconium.

1. In Iconium, the Jews who disbelieved stirred up the minds of the Gentiles, embittering them against the brethren, instigating persecution against Paul and Barnabas.

2. Rejecting the testimony of truth and the signs of the Spirit, they pursued a path of hatefulness and harm, malice and mistreatment (Acts 14:1-7).
- F. The Jews at Thessalonica.
1. For three successive Sabbaths, Paul preached in the synagogue at Thessalonica, reasoning from the scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that Jesus was the Christ. Some Jews were persuaded, along with many God-fearing Greeks and a number of leading women.
 2. However, jealous and unbelieving Jews — aided by some wicked men — formed a mob and set the city in an uproar, making false accusations and forcing the departure of Paul and Silas (Acts 17:1-10).
- G. The Jews at Corinth.
1. At Corinth, Paul reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.
 2. When his countrymen resisted (lit., to rage in battle against, to set oneself against) and blasphemed (lit., to slander, hence to speak lightly or sacred things), he shook out his garments and said, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles” (Acts 18:1-6).
- H. The Jews at Jerusalem.
1. When Paul visited the temple at the end of his third missionary journey, his enemies attempted to kill him. The object of fanatical hatred, Paul was slandered with false accusations, his ministry misrepresented and maligned.
 2. So great was their irrational abhorrence, the Jews were crying out, casting their cloaks into the air, and saying, “Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he should not be allowed to live!” (Acts 21:27-36; 22:17-24; 23:7-13).
- I. The Jews at Rome.
1. Finally, consider the Jews of Rome who gave audience to Paul as he solemnly testified about the kingdom of God and tried to persuade them concerning Jesus.
 2. Some were persuaded, but others would not believe. Rejecting the gospel message, they fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah (Acts 28:16-31; cp. Isaiah 6:8-13; Matthew 13:10-17).

II. Unbelief Among The Gentiles

- A. The philosophers at Athens.
1. During his sojourn at Athens, Paul preached Jesus and the resurrection — first in the synagogue, later in the market place, and finally at the Areopagus.
 2. Among Greek philosophers, his evangelistic efforts were met by skepticism and scorn: “What would this idle babblers wish to say?” echoed at the commencement of his message; at the conclusion, some began to sneer (Acts 17:16-21, 30-33). Human wisdom discounts its divine equivalent (1 Corinthians 1:26-31).
- B. Demetrius, the Silversmith.
1. Demetrius, the shrine-making silversmith of Ephesus, typifies those who reject the truth for material gain.
 2. Couching his covetousness in expressions of concern over the reputation of the great goddess Artemis, his real distress was a potential loss of income

(Acts 19:23-27). Mammon is a demanding mistress (Matthew 6:24).
Covetousness is idolatry (Colossians 3:5-6).

C. Felix, Festus, and Agrippa.

1. Felix exemplifies the spirit of neglectful worldly-mindedness. As Paul reasoned of righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix became frightened, and with good reason: this wicked, self-indulgent ruler was wholly unprepared to stand before God and give account of himself. Refusing the time and opportunity of salvation (which is always now/today, not the uncertain future), Felix procrastinated saying, "Go away for the present, and when I find time I will summon you." Vaguely-defined convenient seasons of tomorrow never arrive (Acts 24:24-27; cp. Isaiah 55:6-7; Haggai 1:1-11; 2 Corinthians 6:1-2).
2. Festus and Agrippa are examples of non-conversion and near-conversion: the former sneering and scornful, the latter halting and hesitant. With dismissive derision, Festus said in a loud voice, "Paul, you are out of your mind! Your great learning is driving you mad." With a tentative faith, Agrippa replied to Paul, "In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian." Yet, neither was willing to become such a one as the apostle: a faithful and fearless follower of Christ (Acts 26:24-29).

Conclusion. Common attitudes are evident among those who are not converted. Dishonest with the evidence, they reject divine revelation. Dominated by carnality, they procrastinate and delay. Have you obeyed the gospel, or does the word of God fall on deaf ears? Have you a ready mind and receptive heart? Seek the Lord while He may be found! Obey while there is time and opportunity.

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