

Shayla: Does Acts 16:31 imply that the entire family gets saved when the father accepts Christ?

Midrash:

The passage you refer to is the one where in response to the Philippian jailer's question "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" the disciples reply:

- **Acts 16:31 HCSB** So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved--you and your household."

It's important that you understand that context because it means the disciples were describing a method, not an act. In Roman society there were strict regulations about hierarchy. The closest that we can come to understanding it today would be to consider the Indian caste system. A father had the power of life and death over his children. Slaves were not even considered human! The disciple's intent, which we can deduce by examining the entirety of Scriptures, was to communicate that belief on the Lordship of Jesus Christ is sufficient for salvation no matter who does it.

This is stated even more clearly in the case of another Gentile, the godly Italian centurion Cornelius:

- **Acts 10:1-2 HCSB** There was a man in Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment. (2) He was a devout man and feared God along with his whole household. He did many charitable deeds for the *Jewish* people and always prayed to God.
- **Acts 11:14 HCSB** He will speak words to you by which you and all your household will be saved.'

Cornelius' final decision did not bring salvation to the entire family. His example of devotion to and fear of God led the entire family take personal ownership of his faith. Acts 10 says they ALL feared God and were devout. When they came face to face with the Gospel they were ready to receive it.

The disciples emphatically taught that, though the promise of the Gospel is extended to all, it is only received by those whom God calls.

- **Acts 2:37-39 HCSB** When they heard this, they were pierced to the heart and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles: "Brothers, what must we do?" (38) "Repent," Peter said to them, "and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus the Messiah for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (39) For the promise is for you and for your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call."

Another passage that people sometimes use to teach this false doctrine of "extended salvation" is Luke 19:9. But in the case of Zacchaeus it doesn't say that Zacchaeus' decision affected the entire family. It merely states that his decision allowed salvation to enter the house. There was someone saved in the household.

- **Luke 19:8-9 HCSB** But Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Look, I'll give half of my possessions to the poor, Lord! And if I have extorted anything from anyone, I'll pay back four times as much!" (9) "Today salvation has come to this house," Jesus told him, "because he too is a son of Abraham.

By the way, this sheds light on another commonly misconstrued passage:

- **1 Corinthians 7:12-14 HCSB** (12) But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has an unbelieving wife, and she is willing to live with him, he must not leave her. (13) Also, if any woman has an unbelieving husband, and he is willing to live with her, she must not leave her husband. (14) For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the Christian husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy.

Having one saved person in the household means that an increased measure of grace is extended to everyone in that household. Not only is there an increased opportunity for salvation for the other members, but the Lord's watchful care over His own is now somewhat extended to the others who occupy the same building, even though they are unbelieving Lowlanders.

This is demonstrated in the life of Noah

- **Genesis 7:1 HCSB** Then the LORD said to Noah, "Enter the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you *alone* are righteous before Me in this generation.

The Scriptures carefully state that Noah alone was considered righteous in his generation. Yet his entire family, because they followed and obeyed this patriarch, ended up safely in the ark. Had they not believed Noah's testimony, they too would have been lost. So their individual decision was what saved them, though Noah's righteousness gave them an improved probability of survival.

We also see this in the case of Rahab.

- **Joshua 2:17-19 HCSB** The men said to her, "We will be free from this oath you made us swear, (18) unless, when we enter the land, you tie this scarlet cord to the window through which you let us down. Bring your father, mother, brothers, and all your father's family into your house. (19) If anyone goes out the doors of your house, his blood will be on his own head, and we will be innocent. But if anyone with you in the house should be harmed, his blood will be on our heads.

Rahab's decision gave an increased chance of survival to her family but only to those who took the promise to heart and obeyed it by getting themselves in her house on time.

This is further illustrated in the life of the widow of Zarephath. Her entire household reaped the benefits of her faith and obedience.

- **1 Kings 17:13-16 HCSB** Then Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid; go and do as you have said. Only make me a small loaf from it and bring it out to me. Afterwards, you may make some for yourself and your son, (14) for this is what the LORD God of Israel says: 'The flour jar will not become empty and the oil jug will not run dry until the day the LORD sends rain on the surface of the land.'" (15) So she proceeded to do according to the word of Elijah. She and he and her household ate for many days. (16) The flour jar did not become empty, and the oil jug did not run dry, according to the word of the LORD He had spoken through Elijah.

However, only she continued to reap the benefits of her faith, and went on to a realization of the truth of whom she was truly obeying and serving.

- **1 Kings 17:24 HCSB** Then the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know you are a man of God and the LORD's word in your mouth is the truth."

Contrast this to Lot who, though a believer, was a failure in regards to his own family.

- **Genesis 19:14 HCSB** So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who were going to marry his daughters. "Get up," he said. "Get out of this place, for the LORD is about to destroy the city!" But his sons-in-law thought he was joking.

If the decision of the father automatically meant the salvation of his entire family, how do we explain Lot's situation? He lost everyone, including his wife. Even his daughters, though they survived the cataclysm, were obviously spiritually lost and morally bankrupt.

If the decision of the father automatically meant the salvation of the entire family, how do we explain Solomon. He had a godly father, a "man after God's own heart", but Solomon went astray.

- **1 Kings 11:4-8 HCSB** When Solomon was old, his wives seduced him *to follow* other gods. His heart was not completely with the LORD his God, as his father David's heart had been. (5) Solomon followed Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Sidonians, and Milcom, the detestable idol of the Ammonites. (6) Solomon did what was evil in the LORD's sight, and unlike his father David, he did not completely follow the LORD. (7) At that time, Solomon built a high place for Chemosh, the detestable idol of Moab, and for Milcom, the detestable idol of the Ammonites on the hill across from Jerusalem. (8) He did the same for all his foreign wives, who were burning incense and offering sacrifices to their gods.

We can see the positive aspect of this principle in the life of Lydia. She worshiped God, even though she didn't fully know Him. When the disciples came, explaining salvation, she listened carefully and the Lord opened her heart to the truth. As a result, her entire household, which had already undoubtedly influenced by her godliness, followed her in this decision and were also converted and baptized.

- **Acts 16:14-15 HCSB** A woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God, was listening. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was spoken by Paul. (15) After she and her household were baptized, she urged us, "If you consider me a believer in the Lord, come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.

Another positive example is Crispus. Luke records that his entire household "believed the Lord" as did many other Corinthians. Again we see that faith in the Lordship and saving power of the Messiah is what is required. Salvation is not passed on "mechanically."

- **Acts 18:8 HCSB** Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed the Lord, along with his whole household; and many of the Corinthians, when they heard, believed and were baptized.

As we have seen, this is not merely a New Covenant teaching. This is how it has always been. We saw the principle illustrated positively in the life of Noah, Rahab and the widow of Zarephath and negatively in the life of Lot and Solomon. We further see it expressed in the Abrahamic covenant.

- **Genesis 17:7-9 HCSB** I will keep My covenant between Me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, as an everlasting covenant to be your God and the *God* of your offspring after you. (8) And to you and your offspring after you I will give the land where you are residing--all the land of Canaan--as an eternal possession, and I will be their God." (9) God also said to Abraham, "As for you, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations are to keep My covenant.

Yahweh offered to extend the covenant to all of Abraham's offspring, but it was a conditional promise. It was to be extended to those who KEPT the covenant (v. 9). This is why it is so critical that we teach God's ways to our children and make sure that each succeeding generation does not forget the Lord or His requirements. That ability to communicate the Good News is what made the Lord choose Abraham in the first place.

- **Genesis 18:19 HCSB** For I have chosen him so that he will command his children and his house after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just. This is how the LORD will fulfill to Abraham what He promised him."

Though we may rejoice in a godly heritage, each of us stands on our own before Yahweh Shaphat. Each of us bears personal responsibility to choose the Lord and to obey His mitzvot. Those who do will live. Those who do not will die.

- **Ezekiel 18:20 HCSB** The person who sins is the one who will die. A son won't suffer punishment for the father's iniquity, and a father won't suffer punishment for the son's iniquity. The righteousness of the righteous person will be on him, and the wickedness of the wicked person will be on him.
- **Ezekiel 18:26-28 HCSB** When a righteous person turns from his righteousness and practices iniquity, he will die for this. He will die because of the iniquity he has practiced. (27) But if a wicked person turns from the wickedness he has committed and does what is just and right, he will preserve his life. (28) He will certainly live because he thought it over and turned from all the transgressions he had committed; he will not die.
- **John 1:12 HCSB** But to all who did receive Him, He gave them the right to be children of God, to those who believe in His name,