

The Acts of the Apostles

LESSON 15

Lesson 15
Chapter 10-11

These chapters are sometimes referred to as the opening of the door of faith to the Gentiles. The incidents that occur in these chapters reflect the Gospel being preached to the first completely Gentile household.

Its primary value in the entire Book of Acts is that it further helps us to understand the spread of the Gospel in the First Century and it also lays the groundwork for the ministry of the Apostle Paul—The Apostle to the Gentiles.

Cornelius Received a Vision and Sent a Delegation for Peter (Acts 10:1-6)

There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, 2 a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always. 3 About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, “Cornelius!” 4 And when he observed him, he was afraid, and said, “What is it, lord?” So, he said to him, “Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God. 5 Now send men to Joppa and send for Simon whose surname is Peter. 6 He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. He will tell you what you must do.” And when the angel who spoke to him had departed, Cornelius called two of his household servants and a devout soldier from among those who waited on him continually. 8 So when he had explained all these things to them, he sent them to Joppa.

Cornelius was a man who positioned himself for blessing. He feared God (vs. 2). Most expositors believe that Cornelius was not a total unbeliever but a “proselyte of the gate.” A proselyte of the gate was a person who had renounced idolatry and had showed great interest in the Jewish faith. He may have observed some of the Jewish rites, but he would not have been circumcised nor would he have been fully accepted as a member of the Jewish community.

He was a devout man (vs. 2). This means that he lived a godly lifestyle to the measure of his personal revelation of God. He had led his household in the same experience of God. The fact that he was a faithful priest in his own household would pay off in a major way when the Gospel was preached in his house. His whole family would come to the Lord (vs. 44, 48).

He gave alms generously to those in need. Giving to those in need is something that always gets God’s attention. He was faithful in prayer and communion with God. He was a just man (vs. 22).

His men described him as follows:

Cornelius the centurion, a just man, one who fears God and has a good reputation among all the nation of the Jews, was divinely instructed by a holy angel to summon you to his house, and to hear words from you.

- He had a good reputation among all men including the Jews (vs.22).
- He had led some of his men in an experience of God (vs. 7).
- He was a man of authority yet a man of humility (vs. 25).

As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. This man was a powerful, Roman, military man who humbled himself before a fisherman from Galilee. Cornelius' military training enabled him to obey swiftly (vs. 7-8).

Peter Received a Vision (Acts 10:9-16)

The next day, as they went on their journey and drew near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour. 10 Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance 11 and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him, and let down to the earth. 12 In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. 13 And a voice came to him, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." 14 But Peter said, "Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean." 15 And a voice spoke to him again the second time, "What God has cleansed you must not call common." 16 This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again.

God works on both ends preparing the hearts of people for His divine appointments. God used the natural circumstances to impart a spiritual vision to Peter. Peter was hungry. Peter was dwelling in the house of Simon the Tanner.

I am sure that there were animal skins of all kinds around. It is possible that some of the skins came from clean and unclean animals alike.

It was just about time to eat. Peter went up on the roof top to pray while supper was cooking (I wonder what will be in that stew). Peter ended up in a deep sleep or trance. Peter had a vision about food—clean and unclean food.

God spoke to Peter three times. This seems to have been the magic number for Peter (John 21:15ff.). Perhaps Peter's mother had taught him how to respond on the third command.

Peter is Summoned to Caesarea (Acts 10:17-23)

Now while Peter wondered within himself what this vision which he had seen meant, behold, the men who had been sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate. 18 And they called and asked whether Simon, whose surname was Peter, was lodging there. 19 While Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are seeking you. 20 Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them." 21 Then Peter went down to the men who had been sent to him from Cornelius, and said, "Yes, I am he whom

you seek. For what reason have you come?” 22 And they said, “Cornelius the centurion, a just man, one who fears God and has a good reputation among all the nation of the Jews, was divinely instructed by a holy angel to summon you to his house, and to hear words from you.” 23 Then he invited them in and lodged them. On the next day Peter went away with them, and some brethren from Joppa accompanied him.

While Peter is having this vision, the men from the house of Cornelius arrive to Joppa from Caesarea to inquire for Peter (a journey of about 30 miles).

Peter tried to understand his vision. He was most likely trying to discern if this was a spiritual dream or a dream that was inspired by his natural circumstance.

The arrival of the Cornelius’s men helped Peter to respond to the vision. Notice the various things that confirmed to Peter that he was hearing from God.

- He had a personal dream or vision.
- The Holy Spirit spoke to him about the men.
- The testimony of the soldiers confirmed what God was saying.
- The testimony of Cornelius confirmed what God was saying.

Peter no doubt had a restless night thinking about the animal skins, a soldier, a couple of other Gentile men, the vision he had seen and the trip he was going to be taking in the morning to the home of a Gentile centurion. Peter was a product of his times and was not very comfortable in eating with Gentiles (Acts 11:3; Gal. 2:11-13).

Peter and Cornelius Meet (Acts 10:24-33)

Cornelius tried to pay homage to Peter and bow down (vs. 25). Peter refused to be worshipped by Cornelius (vs. 26). Peter shared his apprehension with Cornelius and the meaning of his vision (vs.28).

But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.

God showed him that his dream was not about animals but about men. God indicated that the Gospel was for all men (Acts 10:34-35). Cornelius shared his vision with Peter.

Peter Preached to Cornelius’ Household (Acts 10:34-43)

When Peter preached much of his new revelation came out in his preaching.

God shows no partiality (vs. 34-35).

Then Peter opened his mouth and said: “In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.”

People from all nations are accepted by God on the same terms (vs. 35). Christ is not just the Prince of Peace for the Jews; He is Lord of all (vs. 36). The Gospel message of remission of sins is for “whoever believes in Him” (vs. 42- 43).

And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead. To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.

Cornelius and His Household are Saved (Acts 10:44-48)

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. 45 And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. 46 For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter answered, 47 “Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” 48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days.

Notice how God interrupted Peter’s preaching with an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Because this was new territory for Peter, he may or may not have been prepared to finish his message with an appropriate altar call. God did not give him a chance to decide what to do. God took the matter out of his hands and interrupted the message with a mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Notice how Peter and the other Jews that were with him knew that the Gentiles had received the gift of the Holy Spirit (vs. 46). Notice how Peter went immediately to the subject of water baptism for these new converts. This experience of water baptism would be the New Testament circumcision of the heart (Col. 2:11-14).

Peter Reported the Event to the Jerusalem Leaders (Acts 11:1-18)

When Peter got back to Jerusalem, he had some explaining to do. Notice several things about this account.

Peter’s does not seem to have been treated as preeminent. He had to give an account for his actions (vs. 1-3). The other apostles and elders were not sure about what Peter had done. It was an issue of contention (vs. 2-4).

And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him, saying, “You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!” But Peter explained it to them in order from the beginning, saying...

Peter was accurate in his testimony of what had happened without embellishing it or taking anything away from it (vs. 4-14). Peter indicated that God gave the Gentiles the same gift that they had received (vs. 15-17). It was all God and very little of him.

And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning. Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, “John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?

The church leaders accepted and rejoiced in Peter’s testimony (vs.18).

When they heard these things, they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, “Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.

Some of this acceptance may have been the fact that God had used Peter as the one to open this door. Peter may have been one of the least likely apostles to naturally be inclined to do this and had someone else done what Peter did, he may have been the least likely to believe or accept it.

Barnabas and Saul Ministered in Antioch (Acts 11:19-26)

Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only. 20 But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus. 21 And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord. 22 Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch. 23 When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord. 24 For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. 25 Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. 26 And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.

Verse 19 takes us back to where the narrative left off in chapter 8 (before Saul’s conversion, before Philip’s preaching and before Cornelius’ conversion). The Spirit of God was moving in Antioch. As a result Antioch was ripe for the Gospel. God was moving but there was a need for leadership, guidance and direction to channel the movement of the Spirit into the establishment of a local church.

Those who were coming to the Lord needed leadership and they needed teaching or grounding in the Word. The Jerusalem church sent leaders to where God was moving. They responded to the initiative of the Holy Spirit. Barnabas was a good choice of someone to be sent out (Acts 4:36-37).

And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought

the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

- He had proven character.
- He had a spirit of faith.
- He was a Spirit-led person.
- He was in leadership in the home church.
- He was a hard worker (I Cor. 9:6).
- He was an encourager of the brethren and young leaders (Acts 4:36; 9:36-28).
- He was a man of Cyprus—a good natural choice (Acts 4:36).
- He was sold out to the kingdom of God (Acts 4:37).
- He had proven his submission to the apostles (Acts 4:37).
- He was a man with a mission and a clear purpose of heart.

The focus of Barnabas and Saul would be teaching and discipleship. After Barnabas assessed the situation, he realized that the work was great and he would need some help. Tarsus was not that far away, and he remembered a man by the name of Saul. He sent for him and together they grounded the believers in Antioch with intense teaching and discipleship.

They worked to lay a foundation for what would become a pattern church. The foundation included five things. Genuine faith and repentance that was reflected in a turning to the Lord (vs. 21). Cleaving to the Lord with purpose of heart which resulted in a high level of personal commitment (vs. 23, KJV).

Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. –KJV

- Willingness to set quality time aside to be taught the Word of the Lord (vs. 26).
- Responsiveness to the Lord that acted quickly on the prophetic word (vs. 29).
- Genuine Christianity that consisted of a sanctified walk not merely sanctified talk (vs. 26).

The result of their efforts was a Christianity that would become a model to the rest of the world.

And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. Acts 11:26

Notice that these believers did not call themselves Christians; they were called Christians by others. The word “Christian” means Christ-like. When people saw these believers, they were reminded of Christ. What do people see in you?

Relief Sent to Jerusalem (Acts 11:27-30)

And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius

Caesar. 29 Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. 30 This they also did and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

This is the first time that we see a New Testament prophet in action. It appears that the prophets coming down from Jerusalem may have been part of a team sent to confirm the new work in Antioch. In the context of the ministry of the prophets to the Antioch church a prophecy came forth about a coming famine.

There was a famine in Palestine some years later.

Many believe that the phrase “throughout all the world” should be rendered in “all the land.” There is no record of a worldwide famine in this time period. According to Josephus, there was such a famine in Palestine between 44 and 48 A.D. The response of the people of Antioch to the prophecy seems to indicate that they were not the ones that would be affected by the famine but that it would primarily affect those in Jerusalem.

The Christians in Antioch responded to the prophecy in practical ways. When God gives prophecy about future events such as this it is for the purpose of preparing us and motivating us to do something as a result of the information that we are given.

All of this is rather interesting because this prophecy most likely occurred around 41 A.D., which means that the famine would not arrive for another three to five years. In spite of that, notice how the believers responded.

They believed the prophet (II Chr. 20:20).

Jehoshaphat stood and said, “Hear me, O Judah and you inhabitants of Jerusalem: Believe in the LORD your God, and you shall be established; believe His prophets, and you shall prosper.”

They acted immediately on the prophecy. Even though the famine would not occur for a few more years, they acted on the prophecy when it came. They demonstrated a liberal spirit to those who were in need.

Think of the effect it would have if you received money from a church for a famine that had not yet occurred. It would no doubt inspire you to make some preparations of your own and thus spare your family.

They sent Barnabas and Saul to Jerusalem with their financial gift for famine relief (vs. 30).

We will look a little more closely at the church at Antioch in our discussion of Acts 13.