

>>>>>> Acts - Lesson 20 <<<<<<<

- 1) Last time we ended while discussing the fact that the early Christians – those in the first 10 years might not have been very open to accepting Gentiles into their numbers.
- 2) We'll be brought back to this in a shortly – however, continuing with the Acts narrative, we find Peter explaining to the Jews in Jerusalem what had happened at the house of Cornelius.

**Acts 11:4–18 (NIV)**

- 3) In verse 12, Peter mentions the six men.
  - a) They had obviously accompanied him back to Jerusalem rather than going home to Jappa.
  - b) Perhaps another indication of how serious this situation might have been.
  - c) Another indicator is the fact that there were 6 witnesses – remember, the Law only required two.
- 4) Of course, the big indicator here is the fact that Peter is telling the story in detail – virtually a repeat of Luke's original narrative.
- 5) There are some differences in the two accounts but, first;

***Why to you think Peter is telling the story at all? Should it not have been sufficient to simply tell these folks; “hey, let’s rejoice and be glad, the Holy Spirit has come on the Gentiles”?***

***What is actually happening here?***

- 6) To really get the right answer, we have to go back to 11:1-3

**Acts 11:1–3 (NASB 2020)**

<sup>1</sup>Now the apostles and the brothers *and sisters* who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. <sup>2</sup>And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, the Jewish *believers* took issue with him, <sup>3</sup> saying, “You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them.”

- 7) Do we here the echoes of the Pharisees when they were making accusations during Jesus' ministry? ABSOLUTELY!
- 8) But now, it is Peter who is being accused – **not** by the Pharisees but by his Jewish Christian brothers.
- 9) What should be happening is rejoicing over more of Jesus' desires and mission being fulfilled;
- 10) Instead, we are being concerned about eating with unclean folks – oh yes and, by the way – Just like Jesus had done.
- 11) Wright makes a point here about this repetition that I really think is worth mentioning and something we should keep in mind as we continue our Acts study.

The other obvious example is the triple repetition of the story of Paul's **conversion**. Significantly, both cases have to do with remarkable acts of God in doing new and unexpected things in people's lives, especially in extending the **gospel** to the

Gentiles. Significantly, too, in both cases a story is repeated because it is needed in defense of the person concerned.<sup>5</sup>

12) Before we move on, we need to look at the differences in these two tellings of this event.

13) There are a few small but significant details which Luke has added.

- a) **First**, Peter's report now includes that the angel had said to Cornelius that Peter's message would result in him and his household 'being saved'.
  - i) This is a clear indication that Luke does not suppose that Cornelius was 'saved' already.
    - (1) He was a God fearing man but not saved.
- b) **Second**, Peter tells these folks that the Holy Spirit fell on the assembled company 'as I began to speak'.
  - i) Originally, Luke said "while he was speaking"
  - ii) Again, I have to agree with Wright here, Peter is clearly wanting to emphasize the sovereignty, and the surprising activity, of the Holy Spirit.
- c) **Third**, and very significantly to this conversation he is having, Peter tells them that he had remembered some very important words of Jesus. Beginning in vs. 16 we read;

#### Acts 11:16–17 (NASB 2020)

<sup>16</sup> And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' <sup>17</sup> Therefore, if God gave them the same gift as He also gave to us after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?"

14) Truly a "CORRECT" perspective on Peter's part and an "INCORRECT" perspective for his listeners.

15) The closing verse here is rendered in the NIV as "they had no further objections and praised God."

16) The NASB2020 however renders it a little closer to the Greek:

#### Acts 11:18 (NASB 2020)

<sup>18</sup> When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, "Well then, God has also granted to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life."

17) I think this rendering most likely captures the actual feeling better.

18) "Quieted down" is a little different than "having no further objections" – just my opinion.

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<sup>5</sup> Tom Wright, [\*Acts for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-12\*](#) (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2008), 173.

- 19) I personally think the real feelings here are not so much an immediate reversal and joy on the part of the “circumcised believers” who are criticizing Peter but perhaps an acceptance with reservations.
- 20) At any rate, all’s well that end’s well – Right???
- 21) At least for now, it does seem that way.
- 22) The LABC sums up what I think is a reasonable synopsis of what the early believers thought about this:

Most **Jewish believers** thought that God offered salvation only to the Jews because God had given his law to them (Exodus 19–20). A group in Jerusalem believed that **Gentiles** could be saved, but only if they followed all the Jewish laws and traditions—in essence, if they became Jews before they became Christians (this would be the topic of discussion at the Jerusalem council—chapter 15). Thus, when **Peter arrived back in Jerusalem**, he was **criticized** for entering a Gentile home and then eating a meal with Gentiles. Both practices were terribly offensive to devout Jews who feared accidentally breaking one of their strict dietary regulations.<sup>6</sup>

- 23) Paul has likely been preaching to the Gentiles during this period.
- 24) However, the bottom line is not much progress has been made toward what Jesus had commanded.
- 25) So as we discussed, perhaps, this situation with Cornelius is God choosing to kick start this – I really wonder if He was really not so well pleased with this situation at this point.
- 26) And of course it is obvious from this reading, everyone was still NOT onboard with this.
- 27) Every time I let this situation settle into my brain, I find it amazing!
- a) Jesus in His teaching, His interactions with Gentiles, and I think in virtually every way possible made it clear that this was His command and desire – NOT AN OPTION!!!.
  - b) Yet, the resistance is obviously here and in a truly vehement way.
  - c) AND we must point out that even though what we have just discussed seems to move us past this we will find as we continue our study of Acts that we have not.
  - d) In fact, as we pointed out last time, one of the major items that Paul deals with throughout his ministry is the reconciliation and relationships of Jewish and Gentile Christians.
- 28) Unfortunately, history shows us that his efforts along with many other factors were not sufficient to accomplish perhaps the end goal of all Jews accepting Jesus as Messiah.
- a) For all intents and purposes, by the mid second century, Christianity would actually become a predominately Gentile religion.

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<sup>6</sup> Bruce Barton et al., [\*Life Application New Testament Commentary\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 2001), 510–511.

- b) If you google “the first gentile church” you will find a consensus regarding this and, most feel that the church at Antioch which we are going to look at next was a predominant leader in that gentile church.
- c) Additionally, there was a hypothetical **Council of Jamnia** c. 85.
  - i) It is often stated that it condemned all who claimed the Messiah had already come, and Christianity in particular, excluding them from attending synagogue
  - ii) Wikipedia comments on this:

The destruction of Jerusalem and the consequent dispersion of Jews and Jewish Christians from the city (after the Bar Kokhba revolt) ended any pre-eminence of the Jewish-Christian leadership in Jerusalem. Early Christianity grew further apart from Judaism to establish itself as a predominantly Gentile religion, and Antioch became the first Gentile Christian community with stature.

### **Acts 11:19–21 (NIV)**

- 1) As we begin this reading, everything seemed perfectly normal and moving along quiet nicely.
- 2) We should make note here of the two Antioch’s – this is Syrian Antioch NOT Antioch in Pisidia where we will find Paul in chapter 13. Just something to keep in mind.
  - a) Pisidia Antioch is in amongst the cities of Phrygia, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe all are far west and north of Tarsus where Syrian Antioch is east and south of Tarsus and straight north of Caesarea on that coast line.
- 3) Syrian Antioch was a wonderful place to go for those fleeing the persecution after Stephen’s death.
  - a) It was 300 miles north of Jerusalem – a long way away.
  - b) Important commercial center so jobs would be available.
  - c) Third largest city in the Roman empire (500,000) – easy to hide there.
  - d) Also, a large Jewish community.
- 4) Of course, the gospel would be brought with those fleeing and so it would spread there.
- 5) The first thing Luke tells us here really highlights what we were saying a bit ago – there is an isolation of Gentiles rather than an inclusion.
  - a) The gospel was only being shared with other Jews.
  - b) Again, really not what Jesus wanted in all that He taught.
- 6) At the risk of judging too harshly perhaps we should consider that this was a personal internal conflict.
  - a) I don’t want to make excuses for these folks but at the same time, I can see their struggle.
  - b) These were people who wanted more than anything else to please God and to be what He wanted them to be.

- c) I can see where it would be difficult to change their ingrained attitudes toward Gentiles.
  - d) After all, it was God who had set them apart and made them separate from the rest of the nations (Gentiles) from the very start.
  - e) Perhaps God is really understanding what is going on.
  - f) And perhaps this is why He is setting these events – the Syrian conversions, Cornelius, and now those from Cyprus and Cyrene to get this moving as He needed.
  - g) I'm only guessing here – perhaps giving an alternative way to look at this whole issue.
- 7) This idea could be supported as well by the next set of events we see unfolding.