

## Acts 11:1-18

1. Observation and exposition
2. The take-away for us?

### Observation and exposition

1. Read **Acts 11:1-18**

2. Observation and exposition

- a. Overview observations

- i. “Luke’s repetition of the story about Peter and Cornelius in this context shows how important the incident is for his developing narrative and for his understanding of what God was doing at this time.” (Peterson, 341)
  1. We’ll see this account one more time in **15:7-9**.
- ii. Compare Luke’s introduction to this event in **11:1** with his intro in **8:14**, where the Samaritans were “officially” brought in to the church. [SLIDE]
- iii. **11:1-18** is a short retelling of chapter 10, with some minor differences as (or because it’s) presented from Peter’s perspective.
- iv. “Luke’s introduction highlights the extent to which news of events in Caesarea had spread among the believers in Judea. While there may have been some rejoicing in the news that ‘the Gentiles also had received the word of God’, there was disquiet about the fact that this initiative involved Peter lodging and eating with ‘the uncircumcised’.” (Peterson, 342)

- b. Peter criticized by part of the church (**11:1-3**)

- i. Compare this with Jesus being criticized for eating with sinners in:
  1. **Luke 5:30** [SLIDE]
  2. **15:2** [SLIDE]
  3. **19:7** [SLIDE]
- ii. Peter did not use his “apostle trump card”; instead, he took the time to explain to them the events that happened, and how God had led the way.
- iii. “They criticized [Peter] for an action that seemed to have more significance for them than the salvation of these Gentiles. But it must be remembered that Peter’s action challenged their understanding of Scripture and what it meant to be the holy people of God. Such criticism by members of the Jerusalem church shows that Peter’s authority was ‘not such as to carry automatic approval of his activities’.” (Peterson, 343) [SLIDE]

- iv. What does this tell us about the polity of the church in Jerusalem? What was the role of each group?
  - 1. Apostles
  - 2. Elders
  - 3. The church as a whole - congregation
  - 4. Possible case for congregationalism?
  
- c. Peter tells how God directed and controlled the events **(11:4-17)**
  - i. “But Peter began and explained it to them in order...” **(4)**
    - 1. He didn’t defend himself or respond directly to the criticism; rather, he retells how God directed and controlled the events that ended with Peter eating and lodging with Gentiles.
    - 2. Why was this a good move on Peter’s part?
    - 3. Without this personal experience, Peter may have been part of the criticizing group had someone else been in his place. He “speaks as one who needed to have his own attitude in this regard changed by God.” (Peterson, 343).
  
  - ii. Peter gives his version of the vision of the sheet descending from heaven while he was praying in Joppa **(8-10)**
    - 1. There are some minor differences in the details of this account and chapter 10.
      - a. Why? Is this a problem? Why or why not?
      - b. As he was writing Acts, Luke could have made sure all the details were exactly alike, but he didn’t.
      - c. When we retell events that happen to us, we tend to paraphrase, reorder, and substitute vocabulary, among perhaps other tendencies.
      - d. As a web developer writing code for websites in various languages, there are often multiple ways of writing the actual code that have the same final result.
        - i. function choices
        - ii. organization and arrangement
        - iii. naming options
        - iv. whether something happens on the server or in the web browser
        - v. even language choices can vary
    - 2. Note the trinitarian presence in the dialogue with Peter during his vision.

- a. How did Peter distinguish between the voices of Jesus and the Spirit?
  - 3. What are the implications of what the Lord (Jesus) said in verse 9, “What God has made clean, do not call unclean.?” According to Peterson (344-5) there are several:
    - a. “Holiness in terms of ritual cleanness is now replaced by cleansing and sanctification through faith in Christ.”
      - i. **Acts 15:9 [SLIDE]**
      - ii. **20:32 [SLIDE]**
      - iii. **26:17-18 [SLIDE]**
    - b. “Consequently, Jewish evangelists can offer salvation to Gentiles on the same basis that they themselves received it.”
    - c. “Moreover, Jewish and Gentile believers can have table fellowship together, as an expression of their shared holiness in the new community of God’s people.”
    - d. “Finally, the law of Moses can be seen to have been fulfilled and replaced by Christ’s saving work. The reality that it anticipated has come, and so the laws which formerly functioned as a way of identifying the people of God can no longer be allowed to separate Jew and Gentile.”
      - i. **Galatians 2:11-18**
      - ii. **Ephesians 2:11-22**
- iii. Peter tells how he and six others went to Caesarea, met with the Gentiles, and spoke the gospel message to them **(11-14)**
  - 1. “And behold, at that very moment...”
    - a. Ponder God’s control of these events and his perfect timing.
  - 2. “These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man’s house...”
    - a. The importance of witnesses in this critical event.
    - b. Peter may have been expecting trouble in Jerusalem, and asked these six men to go with him to Jerusalem.
  - 3. “he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household.”
    - a. A critical expansion of **10:22, 33**
    - b. Imagine Cornelius’s anticipation of hearing this message while waiting for Peter to arrive!

- c. Was his household saved because Cornelius was saved? Or was it an individual hearing, believing, and salvation for each of them?
- d. We'll encounter this term "saved" again in **15:1, 11** when how Gentiles can be saved is disputed.
  - i. What was the theological confusion of the circumcision party?
- e. Reinforces the idea that while Cornelius was devout and God-fearing, he still needed to hear the gospel of Christ and be saved.

iv. God's visible stamp of approval on this entire event (**15-17**)

- 1. "Began" here versus "while" in **10:44**?
  - a. Hebrewism?
  - b. And/or the Spirit is doing multiple things here
    - i. Regenerating their hearts
    - ii. Enabling their minds to understand the gospel
    - iii. Initiating the speaking of tongues and praising God
- 2. Peter connects this with the day of Pentecost in Acts 2
  - a. He recalls what Jesus said to them in **Acts 1:5**, (and John the Baptist foretold in **Luke 3:16**) [SLIDE]
  - b. Not another distinct Pentecost, but an extension of the same Pentecost arrival of the Holy Spirit.
    - i. Is this an important distinction?
- 3. Peter then challenges the church by asking a rhetorical question that can only have one answer!

d. The church acknowledges (accepts?) God's leading (**11:18**)

- i. Still, not everyone was fully convinced, as we'll see in **Acts 15**
- ii. "repentance that leads to life"
  - 1. "Yet even for those described as devout and God-fearing (10:2), turning to Christ involved a radical reorientation of allegiance and devotion, which is what is meant in this case by *repentance that leads to life*. Not simply repentance of particular sins, but a rejection of everything that hinders the reception of salvation through faith in Christ is meant." (Peterson, 349)
- iii. This is one of several key statements in Acts about God's sovereignty in salvation.

1. Compare **2:47**; 5:14; 10:33, 44; 11:21; **13:48**; **15:4, 8-9, 14**; **16:14**; 18:27

e. More discussion questions **[SLIDES]**

i. God's sovereignty and human responsibility

1. "Haenchen thinks that Luke overdoes God's supernatural interventions, that he thereby 'virtually excludes all human decision' and turns the obedience of faith into 'very nearly the twitching of puppets'. But this is unfair. To be sure, the divine intervention is plain, in the lives of both Cornelius and Peter, but neither of them was manipulated in such a way as to bypass his mind or will. On the contrary, they reflected on what they saw and heard, interpreted its significance, and deliberately chose to obey." Stott, 195

**The take-away for us**

1. "In practical terms, this narrative challenges Christians to be wary of allowing any cultural, social, or inherited religious barriers to hinder the acceptance of new converts into the church. At the same time, it is an encouragement to recognize when a work of God's Spirit is taking place -- perhaps in unexpected ways, in unexpected quarters -- and a warning not to be found opposing that work." Peterson, 350

**Resources**

1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, F. F. Bruce, 1990
2. *The Book of the Acts*, F. F. Bruce, 1988
3. *The Acts of the Apostles*, David G. Peterson
4. *The Message of Acts*, John Stott
5. *The Acts of the Apostles*, Ben Witherington III