

To The Ends Of The Earth

LESSON 11: PREACHING IN JUDEA AND SAMARIA, PART 4 (ACTS 10:24-11:18)

As the gospel was spreading, God facilitated a meeting between the apostle Peter and a man named Cornelius. Although Cornelius was a Gentile, he was to hear a message that concerned salvation. Now, Peter had journeyed to Cornelius, prepared to share that message.

PETER MEETS CORNELIUS (ACTS 10:24-33)

10:24-33. Peter, his six traveling companions (Acts 11:12), and the messengers from Cornelius arrived in Caesarea and found Cornelius waiting. Cornelius had called relatives and close friends to join them. They were all eagerly wanting to know everything the Lord had commanded Peter to tell them! When Peter entered, Cornelius fell at Peter's feet and worshiped him. Peter, however, made it clear that he was not worthy of worship by telling Cornelius to get up, since he was also a man (Acts 14:11-18; Revelation 19:10; 22:8-9). Peter entered and found a large gathering of people waiting. He explained why he agreed to associate with Gentiles (which Jews were not customarily permitted to do, perhaps because of passages like Deuteronomy 7:3-11). Although he had been confused by the vision (vv. 9-16), he now understood God was showing him that he must not call any person impure or unclean (not just applicable to food). This is why Peter agreed to meet with them. Cornelius then explained why he had sent for Peter, recounting the vision he had while he was praying (vv. 3-6). God had heard Cornelius's prayer, remembered his acts of charity, and instructed him to send someone to summon Peter. Cornelius said he was immediately obedient and believed it was good for Peter to have come. Everyone had now gathered in God's presence to hear everything Peter had been commanded by the Lord to teach! Notice that they needed to hear Peter's message for salvation (Acts 11:14)!

PETER PREACHES TO GENTILES (ACTS 10:34-43)

10:34-43. Peter said he had come to understand that God does not show favoritism (Romans 2:6-11). Instead, any person in every nation (Jew or Gentile) who would fear God and do (work) what is right (righteousness) will be acceptable to God (Ecclesiastes

12:13-14). This message that had been sent to Israel was one of good news about peace through Jesus Christ (forgiveness of sins, peace with God; Isaiah 9:6-7; Romans 5:1). Now, Jesus was being proclaimed as being Lord of all (not just to the Jews)! Peter spoke to Cornelius and those who had gathered as having some knowledge about the events that happened concerning the life of Jesus in Judea, beginning with His baptism by John (Luke 3:21-22). Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit (demonstrating Him to be the Messiah, Luke 3:21-22; Isaiah 61:1-3) and power. Jesus did much good and worked many miracles (including casting out demons from those oppressed by Satan, e.g. Luke 4:31-37; 9:37-43). Peter declared that he was an eyewitness to everything Jesus did in Judea and Jerusalem (thus, not speculation or rumor). Yet, Jesus was killed by crucifixion (being hanged on a tree). God raised this Man, Jesus, from the dead on the third day. But, this was no private matter, as God caused Jesus to be seen by many whom God would send as eyewitnesses. These eyewitnesses (specifically, the apostles) ate and drank with Him (demonstrating His bodily resurrection, Luke 24:36-43). The apostles had then been commanded to preach to provide eyewitness testimony that Jesus is the one appointed by God who will judge the living and the dead when He comes (as proven through His resurrection, Acts 17:31). All the prophets also testified of Jesus, that it was through His name that everyone (both Jew and Gentile) who believes (obedient faith, Hebrews 11; James 2:14-26) would receive the forgiveness of sins (Genesis 12:3).

GENTILES OBEY THE GOSPEL (ACTS 10:44-48)

10:44-48. While Peter was speaking (at the beginning of Peter's message, Acts 11:15), the Holy Spirit came down on all those who heard. The Jews (circumcised) who had come with Peter were amazed by the gift of the Holy Spirit (referring to Holy Spirit baptism, Acts 11:15-16) being poured out on the Gentiles. For, these Gentiles were miraculously speaking in tongues (languages they had not studied), declaring the greatness of God, just as the apostles did on Pentecost (Acts 2:1-11). Peter then asked if anyone could withhold water and prevent these Gentiles who had been baptized with the Holy Spirit, as the apostles had earlier, from being baptized (in water). Up to this point, remember that the church consisted of Jews (including Samaritans and proselytes). Now, the baptism of the Holy Spirit had been given to the Gentiles as proof that God opened the door of the kingdom to include them! So, Peter commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ (as required of all, Acts 2:37-41; Mark

16:15-16; Matthew 28:18-20). Peter and his companions were then asked to stay for a few days.

PETER DEFENDS THE GENTILES' CONVERSION (ACTS 11:1-18)

11:1-3. News about the Gentiles receiving the word of God reached the apostles and disciples throughout Judea. When Peter arrived in Jerusalem, the Jewish believers (who had been circumcised) criticized Peter for going to the uncircumcised (Gentiles) and eating with them. For, they were not aware of all that had transpired.

11:4-18. Peter then began an orderly account (step by step) of the events that had transpired – including the vision, the messengers from Cornelius, the message from the Spirit to go, Cornelius waiting for Simon to speak a message concerning salvation, the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Gentiles, and Peter's conclusion about God's acceptance of the Gentiles. Notice that Peter emphasized the Holy Spirit came down on Cornelius and his household as Peter began to speak. This is significant in that Peter's message was necessary for them to be saved (Romans 1:16; Acts 18:8). So, the Holy Spirit coming on them did not save them or mean they were already saved (since they still needed to hear the message, Romans 10:17). Instead, Peter recognized that the Holy Spirit had come upon them (the Holy Spirit baptism John had foretold, Luke 3:16) as the apostles (who believed in Jesus) had experienced at the beginning (of the gospel age, Acts 2:1-4). Furthermore, Peter recognized the Gentiles being baptized with the Holy Spirit on this occasion as something unique. He did not say the Holy Spirit came on the Gentiles in the same way He had come on other disciples. Instead, the other reference point was to what happened to the apostles on Pentecost. Then, rather than view the baptism of the Holy Spirit as saving them, Peter saw this as confirmation that God had opened the doors of the kingdom to them. If God had welcomed the Gentiles (Acts 15:8-9), Peter would not hinder what God was doing! So all those who heard became silent and glorified God, concluding God had given repentance resulting in spiritual life even to the Gentiles!

CONCLUSION

The events involving Cornelius and his household do not just represent another conversion in the book of Acts. Instead, there has now been a critical shift. Rather than the gospel just being preached to the Jews, it is now open to being preached to the Gentiles!

DISCIPLESHIP QUESTIONS

What kind of reception did Peter receive from Cornelius and those who were with him?

What did Peter come to understand about the vision and Gentile people?

Who could be acceptable to God?

What message did Peter preach to Cornelius and his household?

What happened to Cornelius and his household as Peter began to speak?

What was required of Cornelius and his household?

How did the Jewish believers react to the news about Cornelius and his household?

How did Peter prove God's acceptance of the Gentiles to the Jewish believers?

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