

Episode #1203 Acts 11 Part 1-Peter Accused

I. Acts is unique in the New Testament. Rather than the ministry of Jesus Christ on earth, it focuses on what came after, when the Lord had ascended back into heaven. The Lord left His disciples with many commands to carry out, and Acts tells us how they did them.

II. In chapter 10 of Acts, we saw Peter sent by the Lord on a mission he never thought he would be sent on: to carry the gospel to a Gentile household, that of a Roman centurion named Cornelius. After God gave testimony by giving Cornelius and his household the gift of the Holy Spirit, Peter commanded them to be baptized. Now, however, word reaches his fellow apostles.

III. Peter Accused. Acts 11:1-3.

- A. Acts 11:1. Word travels quickly of what happened in Cornelius' house. Some vainly imagine that the word of Christ had gone out to Gentiles from the beginning. They think and teach that the Gentiles were hearing the gospel as long as Christ was on earth; that on the day of Pentecost there were thousands of Gentiles who heard and went out and took the message all over the world and Gentiles believed, and so on. How strange it must be for them to read these words! The apostles and brethren in Judea knew nothing about any Gentiles believing, and they were right on the scene. Clearly this was the first any of them heard of Gentiles believing. Peter preached the word to the house of one Gentile man, and this rocked the believing world at the time. "Gentiles" = Greek *ethne*, meaning "nations," here in context those other than Israel.
- B. Verse 2. Many today would have congratulated Peter, but these contend with him. Do we understand why they were upset?
- C. Verse 3. Peter is accused of wrongdoing.
 - 1. This matter of eating was a rather serious thing because it indicated the closest possible relationship and fellowship.
 - 2. We should not be too hard on them. Remember, Peter had this same attitude until he received a vision from the Lord thrice repeated, and direct instructions from the Holy Spirit.
 - 3. The apostles did not believe they were supposed to go to Gentiles. They thought their mission was to go everywhere to reach their fellow Israelites wherever they might be. Acts 11:19.
 - 4. This was not their mistake, but the Lord's command. Matthew 15:24, John 20:21. Then Israel would enter into the kingdom of God, and go to all the other nations as ambassadors to bring them into the kingdom as well. Matthew 28:19-20. Yet they also knew that Israel was their first priority.
 - 5. Now, God had changed the program, without explaining to them why. This seemed contrary to the instructions Jesus Christ Himself had given them. No wonder they were not quick to accept this! For this, they would call even so great a man as Peter to account.

IV. Peter's Defense. Acts 11:4-18.

- A. Verse 4. Peter can relate to their attitude, knowing how he thought before receiving God's instructions. He explains it to them carefully, believing they will recognize this to be the will of God like he did once they hear the whole story.
- B. Verse 5. The Holy Spirit records for us Peter's repetition of the story. Clearly, in the Lord's mind, this is a significant event, and deserves repetition. Peter starts from when he was in the city of Joppa praying. In chapter 10, the Lord started by

introducing us to Cornelius, but this time the story is from Peter's perspective. Peter does not repeat all the details we read in chapter 10, but what seems important to him, and helpful to convince these people who were charging him with being unfaithful to their mission.

- C. Verse 6. Peter's words are inspired. Yet Peter also supplements the story with new details. When God inspires, He does not have to say the exact same thing twice, but what He does have to say must always be right.
- D. Verse 7. The Greek quotation here is exactly the same as Acts 10:13.
- E. Verse 8. Peter's words as he gives them here are not exactly the same as in chapter 10. Yet remember that this was repeated three times, and so perhaps Peter did not use the exact same words every time. This should not surprise us, for when we repeat ourselves, we often will change the wording slightly, so as not to sound like a broken record.
- F. Verse 9. Again Peter repeats what the heavenly voice said, exactly as it was spoken to him.
- G. Verse 10. Now, through Peter's story, the rest of the apostles have been brought to the same point Peter was in Acts 10: wondering what this vision and command might mean.
- H. Verse 11. This was no coincidence, and showed clearly that God had worked this all out. Peter notes the three men arrived just after he had had this vision three times. "Sent" is a form of Greek *apostello*, for they had been sent with Cornelius' authority. Not only his, but the authority given to him by the angel of God to send! Peter does not mention that these men were uncircumcised Gentiles, but they already knew this.
- A. Verse 12. The Spirit's command strengthens Peter's case. Now, Peter presents the six brethren who accompanied him on this journey. (This is how we learn there were six of them.) They can affirm all that Peter says took place there. Do not think poorly of these men for needing all this evidence to believe Peter. Taking the word to Gentiles was a very radical thing! Peter himself had needed all this in order to be convinced himself that he should go to a Gentile. God had surprised them all by this event.
- B. Verse 13. Peter now repeats for them in his own words the story that Cornelius told him. Cornelius was told to send for him, the Greek *apostello*. That made those he sent Cornelius' apostles.
- C. Verse 14. Peter summarizes what the angel said rather than repeating it word-for-word. The words by which Cornelius and all his household would be saved are in Acts 10:36-43. We know the word he told them: that those who believe on Jesus Christ shall receive remission (forgiveness) of sins.
- D. Verse 15. This happened before he had even finished what he had to say.
 - 1. Notice that the Holy Spirit had fallen on them at the beginning, and had not continued to fall upon them since that time. Once they were baptized with the Holy Spirit, His power remained with them, and there was no need for any further fallings.
 - 2. The Spirit fell upon them "as upon us at the beginning." Some teach that tongues in Acts 2 were languages recognized by the hearers, but these later tongues were unrecognizable babble. But this was the same kind of tongues as at the beginning. There is no difference between what happened here and what happened in Jerusalem on Pentecost.

3. "Holy Spirit" = *to pneuma to hagion* in Greek, or "the Spirit the Holy," meaning the Person of the Spirit, not His power.
 4. God Himself testified to the legitimacy of what happened to them. "At the beginning" = *en arche*, referring to Pentecost. This phrase is used many times in the New Testament, like in I John.
- E. Verse 16. The fact that Peter says he remembered does not mean that he had forgotten this had occurred, but that this brought it freshly to his mind.. What he means is that when this became very definite in his mind, he realized that it had an application to this that was happening. Holy Spirit = *pneumati hagio*, "spirit holy," without "the" indicates the power of the Spirit, not His Person. They had been identified with holy power at Pentecost. Now these Gentiles, too, had received that identification, as Peter could clearly see.
 - F. Verse 17. Peter came to this conclusion, and the apostles and elders should too, since God had clearly acted. He had six witnesses to prove it! They could not argue against God.
 - G. Verse 18. What can they say when this whole thing was clearly from beginning to end brought about and motivated by God Himself? Thankfully they were not reluctant to go along with this just because they didn't understand it. They glorified God for this! Therefore eight years after Pentecost the very first Gentiles are brought into the Acts period company of believers. God had brought these Gentile believers into their company without explaining it to them or letting them know what His intention was in doing it. They would have to wait until Paul started his ministry, when He would reveal further His purposes regarding the Gentiles and the part they would have to play in His work. These do not become a part of the Israel of God. While they are partakers of Israel's spiritual things, they will always be subservient to the apostles who are Jews. This one household will remain all the Gentile believers there are for another six years. It is impossible to believe that Peter and others would say, "Well, we've done it now once, so we can do it a thousand times." No; that would be twisting and warping the Lord's commission to Peter to suit their own ends, and they could not do such a thing in the Acts period without the severest possible penalty falling on them from the Lord. This one Gentile household are the only Gentile believers who through the work of the apostles have put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. They will continue to be the only Gentile believers for another six years.

VI. Conclusion: The apostles did not believe that the gospel they had been given to proclaim was meant for Gentiles. Thus, they were shocked when they learned of Peter proclaiming to Gentiles. We should not blame them for this, for Christ had told them He was not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Yet God was clearly behind this, and had changed the program without explaining to them what He was doing. When they saw this clearly, they glorified Him and were content. Yet this did not change their proclaiming to Jews only. We will see this in future messages.