

THE GOSPEL IS ALSO FOR THE GENTILES

PLEASE do not read these comments until you have read the Scripture for this lesson. First, let the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.

Acts 10-12 mark a transition from the Jewish-oriented ministry of Peter, which ends in Acts 12, to the Gentile-oriented ministry of the Apostle Paul, which begins in Acts 13. This transition is marked by two events in chapter 10. First, Peter received a vision from God that instructed him not to treat Gentiles like unclean beasts. Second, Peter entered the house of Cornelius, a Gentile, and while he preached the gospel to him, his family and near friends, they received the gospel of Jesus Christ and were given the Holy Spirit. It was contrary to Jewish law for a Jew to enter the house of a Gentile and treat them like a Jew. God gave Peter and the early church a lesson in dispensations. God was ushering in a new economy known to us as "the church age," which treated both Jews and Gentiles alike. Chapter 12 gives the final look at Peter (except for a brief statement by him in Acts 15) before attention is focused on the apostle Paul and his ministry in chapters 13-28.

I. Conversion of Cornelius — 10:1-11:18

A. Cornelius' Vision of the Angel — 10:1-8

10:1-4 — Notice the character of Cornelius, even before he was saved: he is called a "devout man and one that feared God with all his house" - v. 2. In the same verse he is also described as one who gave much alms and prayed to God always. In v. 4 the prayers and alms of Cornelius are called a memorial before God. In v. 22, Cornelius is termed a "just" man. This testimony clearly shows that Cornelius was obedient to the revelation of God that he had learned in an Old Testament context; it only remained for Peter to come and instruct him in the way of grace and remission of sins in Jesus Christ.

10:5-8 — Cornelius obeyed God immediately by sending trusted men to Joppa to bring Peter to him.

B. Peter's Vision of the Animals — 10:9-16

10:9-16 — Peter is taught through a vision repeated three times that God's economy had changed. The lesson was not primarily concerning foods, but about men, as Peter testified, "God has shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean" - v. 28.

C. Peter's Introduction to Cornelius — 10:17-33

10:17-23 — The messengers of Cornelius found Peter in Joppa and gave him a brief word of introduction about Cornelius and God's message to him. Peter was told by these messengers that God wanted him to come and speak to Cornelius. Moments earlier the Spirit of God also had spoken directly to Peter and told him the same message. Peter took six Jewish men as witnesses of this meeting because it would be very controversial in Jewish circles (Acts 11:12). It was not considered proper for a Jew to enter a Gentile's home under any circumstance, not even for preaching the gospel.

10:24-26 — God prepared the sinner and the soul-winner. When Peter met Cornelius, he found him to be a most humble centurion. He went so far as to fall down before Peter and worship him, but Peter lifted him up and told him that he was only a man. The worship of Peter or any other man is as wrong today as it was then.

10:27 — Peter also discovered that Cornelius was a man of faith. He believed God was going to show him the way of salvation through Peter and so he had gathered his relatives and close friends to share this good news with them (cf. v. 33).

10:28-33 — Cornelius also revealed his sincere piety by his fasting, by his prayers, by his almsgiving and by his obedience to God's command to send for Peter.

D. Peter's Message on Salvation — 10:34-43

10:34-43 — Notice how clear and simple the gospel was given each time these apostles preached. In v. 38 the person of Jesus Christ is introduced; then His death on the cross is preached - v. 39; this is followed by His resurrection - v. 40; which is concluded by an invitation to believe Him and receive remission of sins - v. 43. It is in this simple gospel message that the power of God rests - Rom 1:16.

E. The Gentiles' Reception of the Holy Spirit — 10:44-48

10:44-48 — These Gentiles received the Holy Spirit when they were saved just as saved sinners do today. Notice that their salvation and simultaneous reception of the Holy Spirit both preceded baptism. The subsequent speaking in tongues was a sign to the Jews that **God** was working among Gentiles making them one body in Christ with the Jews – 1 Cor 12:13.

II. Charge against Peter — 11:1-18

The saved Jews in Jerusalem had not yet comprehended that God was forming the Jews and Gentiles into the body of Christ. They contended with Peter over his eating with the uncircumcised. When Peter related his sheet vision, his preaching and the evidence that these Gentiles were baptized with the Holy Spirit by speaking in tongues, the Jews then glorified God with Peter that salvation also was given to the Gentiles (note: it was at this meeting that Peter needed the help of the six Jewish brethren who were witnesses of everything he said and did. Without these six brethren, Peter may not have convinced the men at Jerusalem so easily).

III. Church in Antioch — 11:19-30

This short parenthesis carries further the record of salvation to the Gentiles and prepares the reader for the events of Acts 13; i.e., Saul and Barnabas ministering in the church at Antioch.

11:19-21 — The church at Antioch was founded by those scattered in the persecution following the martyrdom of Stephen - v. 19. This initial evangelistic outreach was to the "Jews only," but some **took** it upon themselves to speak to the Grecians in Antioch and "a great number believed" - vv. **20-21**.

11:22-24 — News of this thriving church reached Jerusalem and they dispatched Barnabas to instruct the new congregation. Barnabas was the likely choice since he originally was from Cyprus - 4:36. Cyprus was not far from Antioch.

The city of Antioch was the third most important city in the Roman Empire, second in importance only to Rome and Alexandria. The population of the city at this time is estimated at near **500,000**. It boasted a main street of over 4 miles.

11:26 — The saints were called "Christians" first in Antioch. The term means "men of Messiah" and was obviously given to these believers by the city's Gentiles (Jews would never call any people, "men of the Messiah"). These believers spoke so much of Jesus Christ and centered their lives so much in Jesus Christ that they were probably given the name out of contempt.

11:27-30 — Relief was sent from Antioch to Jerusalem. This was not a "social gospel" program to feed the hungry and then give them the gospel. It was relief for believers, not for unbelievers. This had nothing to do with missions or evangelism.

Relief was coming from the mission church and being sent to the home church.

If this famine were worldwide, why did Jerusalem need special relief? First, they had sold all their possessions (cf. Acts 2:45). Second, they were undergoing a severe persecution.

IV. Custody of Peter — 12:1-19

12:1 — "Herod" - There are six altogether: (1) Herod the Great, who slew the children - Mt 2:16; (2) Herod Antipas, who beheaded John the Baptist i- Mt 14:1-11; (3) Herod Agrippa I, who killed James and imprisoned Peter — Act 12:1-19; (4) Herod Agrippa II, who heard Paul's convicting message when Paul was in prison and appealed to be heard in Caesar's court - Acts 25:13-26:32; and (5, 6) two sons of Herod the Great named Herod Philip by different wives — Mt 14:3; Lk 3:1.

12:1-4 — In his desire to please the Jews, Herod beheaded James and imprisoned Peter to do the same to him.

12:5-19 — A summary of Peter's imprisonment and miraculous escape is given in these verses: (1) it was accompanied by unceasing prayer from the church - v. 5; (2) God waited until the very last night before He answered - v. 6; (3) note that this final night before Peter's execution, Peter was sleeping between two guards, a tremendous testimony to his faith in God and the peace that resulted (1 Pet 5:7). The angel had to smite him on the side to wake him up — vv. 6-7; (4) his chains fell off and he followed the angel out of the prison — vv. 7-10; (5) Peter went to the house of Mary, but they did not believe it was he at the door. They thought it was his angel — vv. 11-17. God graciously answered their fervent praying, even though they lacked perfect faith in God to do what they asked. When Herod discovered that Peter was not in prison, he ordered all the guards to be executed.

V. Collapse of Herod — 12:20-25

12:20-23 — First, notice the contrast of Herod's life and death. In life he used his power to persecute God's people; in death God used His power to kill him to give His people relief from persecution. While speaking before a crowd of Sidonians, he, in his pompous apparel and pride, failed to glorify God when the people said he was a god. Thus, God smote him and he died.

12:24 — Second, notice the contrast of Satan's attempt to stop the Word of God from spreading and God's ability to cause His Word to grow and multiply - v. 24. God's Word is the truth, and the truth cannot be silenced!

12:25 — Barnabas and Saul left Jerusalem with John Mark. These men will begin a missionary trip in the next chapter (Acts 13) that will spread the Word of God into Asia Minor. Later Paul will take the Word to Europe in two more missionary trips. Satan could not stop the spread of the gospel when men surrendered themselves fully to God as His ambassadors.