Missions – Acts and Onward

Week 5 – Gentiles Unite

Introduction: Christians as they begin to be called in this section expanded their ranks and began to utilize and equip more leaders. These are pivotal moments in the life of the church and bring us ever closer to Paul's great works, which we have all heard about to some degree.

I. Peter and the Gentiles

1. Although there are human elements to the Introduction of the Gentiles, there are also Spiritual dimensions.

A. This Gentile sought the Lord with the limited knowledge he had and lived accordingly.

† **Acts 10:1-2 –** *There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band,[2] A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.*

- *Cornelius is "devout," generously charitable, "God-fearing" (10:2), and "righteous" (10:22), yet he still needs to be saved (11:14)*[1] PTQ

B. God sent a special revelation to direct him to the truth.

† **Acts 10:3-6 –** *He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius.[4] And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.[5] And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter:[6] He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.*

C. While God is drawing those whom he intends to save, he also prepares the messengers. PTQ

i. God put Peter right where he needed to be at the end of the previous chapter.

1) The placement of Peter in Joppa is amusing historically.

2) God set Peter up to essentially be the reversal of Jonah.

3) Jonah was going to travel to Tarshish (Spain) in an attempt not to tell the heathens God's plan, but to do so, he travels down to Joppa, which is exactly where God has sent a vision to Peter to invite Cornelius and Gentiles in general into the church. (Acts 10)[2] PTQ

ii. Growing the Christian requires both successes and turmoils.

† **Acts 10:9 –** *On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour:*

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[1] David E. Garland, *Acts*, ed. Mark L. Strauss and John H. Walton, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books: A Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2017), 110.

[2] Henry H. Halley, *Halley's Bible Handbook*, Completely Revised and Expanded (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 461.

1) It is also successfully seeing people saved and growing and personal spiritual disciplines in preparation for a great move of the Spirit through you. (in other words, faithfulness to one's lot)

† **Acts 10:11-13 –** *And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending upon him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth:[12] Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.[13] And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.*

† **Acts 10:14-15 –** *But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.[15] And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common*

2) Sometimes the turmoil is not understanding why God wants you to do something or even what exactly God desires for you to do. **PTQ**

† **Acts 10:19-20 –** *While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee.[20] Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them.*

3) Had Peter had the whole picture in front of him, then he might have struggled more to obey. **PTQ**

2. God has to overcome prejudice and misgivings in the preacher.

i. Cornelius tried to make sure those he knew and loved could hear the message and they sought it eagerly.

† **Acts 10:24 –** *And the morrow after they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and he had called together his kinsmen and near friends.*

ii. Between chapters 10 and 12, the difference in how people respond to received worship is telling of their views of themselves. Peter recognizes his insufficiency and wants to redirect the worship elsewhere.

† ***Acts 10:28-29*** *– And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.[29] Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?*

iii. Peter's predisposition hindered his initial sharing of the Gospel, and so Cornelius explained why he called and what was wanted from the Apostle. **PTQ**

† **Acts 10:34-35** *– Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:[35] But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.*

iv. Peter then preaches the messages of Christ expresses Jesus person, life, death, resurrection, and command of all as Lord and Judge

† **Acts 10:42-43** *– And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.[43] To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.*

v. Peter gave a whosoever message and the recipients believed it.

† **Acts 10:44-46** – *While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.* ***45*** *And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.* ***46*** *For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter,*

vi. God made sure there were two kinds of witnesses to the belief of the Gospel present.

1) The internal witness of the Spirit, which spoke in tongues, as it had done with the Jews and likely the Samaritans. **PTQ**

2) The external witness of other believing Jews who saw what happened and could help vouch for Peter's upcoming claims.

3) When Cornelius and other non-Jews received the Holy Spirit in the same way that Peter and other Jews did, Peter understood that the people of God were not limited to those of Jewish ancestry and social custom (10:34–35, 44, 47).[3]

4) Norman Geisler to this point notes, "Three conversions signal the future ministry of the church (8:1–11:18). First, an Ethiopian (the eunuch) was converted. Of Noah's three sons, he was a son of Ham (chap. 8). Next, a Tarsian was converted (Saul), who was a son of Shem (chap. 9). Finally, an Italian (Cornelius) was converted to Christianity. He was a son of Japheth (chap. 10). Thus the universality of the Gospel was symbolized—embracing the whole race."[4] **PTQ**

vii. Here we see the believers received the Holy Ghost upon belief and were baptized after.

1) We talked before about how God does this in different orders in the book of Acts so that we don't get too dogmatic in the formative years. **PTQ**

2) Baptism was used as a public declaration of conversion (see comment on 2:37–38)—but accompanied by circumcision, which is not demanded here. Peter's lodging at a Gentile home for several more days would compound the offense to Jewish piety but drives home Peter's lesson (10:28).[5]

II. Peter's explanation and continuation

1. Before Peter returns, the news of the salvation of the Gentiles reaches Jerusalem.

A. It is worth noting that although the church is Jewish, or at least Jewish and Samaritan, at this point the people upset are called those of the circumcision.

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[3] Walter A. Elwell and Robert W. Yarbrough, *Encountering the New Testament: A Historical and Theological Survey*, ed. Walter A. Elwell, Fourth Edition, Encountering Biblical Studies (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2022), 214.

[4] Norman L. Geisler, *A Popular Survey of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2014), 115.

[5] Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, Second Edition (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2014), 353.

† ***Acts 11:2-3*** *– And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him,Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them.*

B. What was the big deal of eating with the Gentiles? **PTQ**

2. Peter explained all that happened, realizing how his vision was preparing him for what occurred, and explained that 6 others also witnessed it.

A. Here Peter adds a detail which is not addressed previously.

† **Acts 11:15-18 –** *And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning.[16]* ***Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost.***[17] *Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God? When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.*

i. It is wise for anyone who calls himself a disciple of Christ not to try to withstand God. Although Peter had pulled out a not-so-Lord three times in the last chapter.

ii. It is also worth saying that although they were referenced as the circumcision, they gladly accepted it in the New Gentile followers of the way. **PTQ**

III. God's Great Work and New Main Workers.

1. The story picks up back with the effects of Saul's persecutions and brings to bear the effects of his work.

† ***Acts 11:19-21*** *– Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only.****20*** *And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus.****21*** *And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.*

2. Barnabas was sent to help establish a church in Antioch and he also got help from a capable leader.

A. Barnabas was capable on his own. **PTQ**

† **Acts 11:23-24** *– Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.****24*** *For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord.*

B. He saw the benefit of having other Godly leaders with him who could teach the people.

i. "As an ex-Pharisee, trained in and zealous for the law, a Hebrew of Hebrews, a well-traveled Roman citizen, an experienced preacher of the gospel, and at home in the Greek-speaking world, he has a unique background that makes him ideal as a special envoy of Christ to the gentiles in Antioch."[6]

[6] Garland, *Acts*, 120.

ii. "It is possible that proclaiming Jesus as Lord has sparked unrest among the Jewish community, and the Roman authorities have blamed it on the Christ-followers as distinguished from other Jews. Or it may be that so many gentiles have joined the church that outsiders regard them as so different from a Jewish ethnic group that they have given believers the name to differentiate them"[7]

† **Acts 11:25-26** – Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul:[26] And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.

iii. Interestingly here is a several year gap that gets missed by people. **PTQ**

iv. ***"Damascus (A.D. 32)***[12] Paul preached in the synagogues of Damascus soon after his conversion (Acts 9:19–22)

v. ***Arabia (A.D. 32/33)*** **-** Paul describes in Galatians 1:17 how he preached the gospel after his conversion without first consulting with the apostles in Jerusalem, going to Arabia (also called Nabatea).

vi. ***Jerusalem (A.D. 33/34)*** **-** After his forced departure from Arabia and Damascus, Paul returned to Jerusalem, where he had been based as a persecutor of the church three years earlier.

vii. ***Syria and Cilicia (A.D. 34-42)*** **-** Paul traveled via Caesarea to Tarsus (Acts 9:30), his home town (Acts 21:39; 22:3), the metropolis of Cilicia that was administered by the Roman governor of the Province of Syria throughout much of the first century. Paul preached the gospel in the regions of Syria and Cilicia, a fact that was known in the Judean churches (Gal 1:21–24). Paul certainly engaged in missionary work in Tarsus, but he established churches in other cities as well: the letter drafted at the conclusion of the Apostles' Council is sent to Gentile Christians in Antioch, in Syria and in Cilicia (Acts 15:23), a fact that presupposes churches in cities besides Antioch (see also Acts 15:41)"[8] **PTQ**

3. Agabus, a prophet of Jerusalem, noted a coming dearth and that the churches in Judea would need help; thus, Barnabas and Paul were chosen as the people to send the gift from Antioch.

A. The naming of an emperor helps date the dearth.

i. Paul and Barnabas consistently were faithful wherever God put them, and their faithful work grew and blessed the church.

ii. Agabus accurately predicted that a famine would occur during the reign of Claudius (AD 41–54).[9] **PTQ**

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[7] Garland, *Acts*, 120.

[12] This date assumes that Paul's conversion took place in A.D. 31/32, the second year after Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. See Rainer Riesner, *Paul's Early Period:*

[8] Eckhard J. Schnabel, "Paul the Missionary," in *Paul's Missionary Methods: In His Time and Ours* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 37.

[9] Elwell and Yarbrough, *Encountering the New Testament: A Historical and Theological Survey*, 215.

B. Prophecies, tongues, and other gifts of the Spirit were still common in these early years, especially amongst the Apostles.

4. Political Persecution begins.

A. The First Apostle has been killed and Peter has been apprehended

† **Acts 12:1-3** – *Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church.[2] And he killed James the brother of John with the sword.[3] And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.)*

i. While in prison Peter was delivered to four quarternions of solders.

- "The basic unit of the Roman army was the *contubernium*, composed of eight soldiers who shared a tent; half units were sometimes assigned to special tasks, as here (sixteen soldiers total)."[10] **PTQ**

ii. Perhaps these groups of four worked in four three-hour shifts during the night. Agrippa perhaps feared armed resistance. Luke may use "Passover" in its general sense in this period to refer to the entire Feast of Unleavened Bread.

iii. Following Roman custom, he was known to execute criminals for public entertainment.[11]

iv. Peter was jailbroken by the angel of the Lord, whose identity we don't know in the New Testament, according to the prayers of the people. **PTQ**

† **Acts 12:5** – *Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.*

v. Peter was so amazed by what was happening that he thought it to be a dream, and the people whose house the church was holed up in also didn't believe it was Peter at their door. V. 6-16

† **Acts 12:12** – *And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying.*

vi. Here we see many from the early church meeting in the family house of John Mark. **PTQ**

B. Peter had the church communicate to James (likely the brother of Jesus) and the other Apostles what happened and he headed out.

i. The disappearing act from Peter cost the soldiers under Herod their lives. V. 19.

ii. Herod's tyranny came back to bite him as God allowed him to go to a place and exalt himself in front of people, and so God brought judgment on him.

† **Acts 12:20-25** – *And Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon: but they came with one accord to him, and, having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, desired peace; because their country was nourished by the king's country.[21] And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them.[22] And the*

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[10] Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 355.

[11] Ibid.

*people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man.**23** And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost.**24** But the word of God grew and multiplied.**25** And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark.*

1) Interestingly, as the death of Herod occurred, the spread of the church and the word of God grew.
2) "Jewish tradition reports that other tyrants who persecuted God's people were consumed by worms (Jdt. 16:17; 2 Macc. 9:9)."[12]
3) Paul and Barnabas sought out John Mark, who had potential for ministry, and took him with them to Antioch. **PTQ**

Conclusion: God has protected His church. But that doesn't mean everyone was safe. Sometimes God intends to use the life and death of different people to bring about greater growth in His church. God does not need any of us. But he faithfully uses us in the proclamation of the Gospel. In the communion of believers and growing and discipling one another, and in doing so, allows us to be a part of the great work which he is accomplishing throughout the world.

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