

THE BOOK OF ACTS

Part 7: Gentile Church is Born (chs. 10-12)

(No. 1119 – - NLC)

I. CORNELIUS CALLS FOR PETER

Acts 10:1-8: ¹At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. ²He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. ³One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, “Cornelius!” ⁴Cornelius stared at him in fear. “What is it, Lord?” he asked. The angel answered, “Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. ⁵Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. ⁶He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea.” ⁷When the angel who spoke to him had gone, Cornelius called two of his servants and a devout soldier who was one of his attendants. ⁸He told them everything that had happened and sent them to Joppa.

A. **Cornelius**—a devout, God-fearing Roman centurion (vv.1-2)

1. As a centurion, he had command of about one hundred soldiers.
2. Cornelius was an honorable man who, though not yet saved (see Acts 11:14), was walking faithfully in the light that had been given him through his conscience; as Paul would later explain, he was a Gentile, though not having the law, he did by nature the things required by the law:

Rom. 2:13-15: ¹³For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. ¹⁴(Indeed, when **Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law,** ¹⁵since **they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.**)

3. Cornelius was devout, God-fearing, gave generously to the needy, and prayed regularly.
 4. God would soon give him the light of salvation through the apostle Peter.
- B. Cornelius' prayers and gifts came up before God and received God's attention (v.4).
- C. With unquestioning obedience, the centurion sent off two of his servants and one soldier to bring Simon Peter from Joppa (vv.5-8).

II. PETER'S VISION

Acts 10:9-23: ⁹About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. ¹⁰He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. ¹¹He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. ¹²It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. ¹³Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat."

¹⁴"Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean." ¹⁵The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." ¹⁶This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.

¹⁷While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon's house was and stopped at the gate. ¹⁸They called out, asking if Simon who was known as Peter was staying there. ¹⁹While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Simon, three men are looking for you. ²⁰So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them." ²¹Peter went down and said to the men, "I'm the one you're looking for. Why have you come?"

²²The men replied, "We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to have you come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say." ²³Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests.

- A. In a vision, Peter saw all kinds of animals, both clean and unclean according to the ceremonial law (see Lev.11), and was commanded to eat them (vv.9-13).
- B. **“Surely not, Lord!”** Peter replied. “I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.” (v.14)
1. Observance of the Mosaic laws of clean and unclean was so deeply ingrained in Peter’s mind that he refused to obey the Lord, saying: “Surely not, Lord!”
 - a) Whoever says “surely not” should never add “Lord,” and whoever truly says “Lord” will never say “surely not.”
 - b) Human nature is very slow to let go of old religious traditions, even when it is the *Lord* telling us to do so.
 2. Peter boasted about his perfect record in the matter of eating only kosher food.
- C. This prompted the voice to speak to him a second (and third) time, **“Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.”** (v.15)
1. Jesus had already laid the groundwork for the eventual removal of the laws of clean and unclean foods:

Mark 7:14-23: ¹⁴Again Jesus called the crowd to Him and said, “Listen to me, everyone, and understand this.

¹⁵Nothing outside a man can make him ‘unclean’ by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him “unclean.” ¹⁶[If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.] ¹⁷After He had left the crowd and entered the house, His disciples asked Him about this parable. ¹⁸“Are you so dull?” He asked. “Don’t you see that **nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him ‘unclean’?** ¹⁹For it doesn’t go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body.” (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods “clean.”) ²⁰He went on: “**What comes out of a man is what makes him ‘unclean.’** ²¹For from within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²²greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. ²³All these evils come from inside and make a man “unclean.””

2. But it is clear that Peter's vision had deeper significance than the mere matter of clean and unclean foods. True, with the coming of the New Covenant, these regulations concerning foods would no longer be in effect:

1 Tim. 4:3-5: ³*They [false teachers] forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from **certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving** by those who believe and who know the truth. ⁴For **everything God created is good**, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, ⁵because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.*

3. But the real significance of the vision was this: God was about to open the door of faith to the Gentiles (see v.28). As a Jew, Peter had always looked upon the Gentiles as unclean, as aliens, as strangers, as far off, as godless. But now God was going to do a new thing (see Eph. 2:11-19). Gentiles (represented by the unclean beasts and birds) were going to receive the Holy Spirit the same as the Jews (clean beasts and birds) had already received Him. National and religious distinctions were to be dissolved, and all true believers in the Lord Jesus would be on the same level in the Christian fellowship.
- D. While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius arrived "right then" (Acts 11:11) at the house looking for him; the Holy Spirit informed Peter that He had sent the visitors (vv.17-20).
1. Perfect timing—the Sovereign Lord is in control of every detail!
 2. Peter was then directed to go down and meet the men who were looking for him.
- E. Peter then learned how an angel of God had directed Cornelius to send for Peter to come and speak to his entire household (vv.21-22) a "message through which he and his household would be saved" (Acts 11:14).
- F. "Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests." (v.23)
1. Taking Gentiles into his house was contrary to the accepted Jewish practice (see v.28).

2. By providing lodging for them, Peter was already taking the first step toward accepting Gentiles.

III. PETER AT CORNELIUS' HOUSE

The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa went along. ²⁴The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. ²⁵As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. ²⁶But Peter made him get up. "Stand up," he said, "I am only a man myself."

²⁷Talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. ²⁸He said to them: "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean. ²⁹So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?"

³⁰Cornelius answered: "Four days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me ³¹and said, 'Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor. ³²Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea.' ³³So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us."

- A. "The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa went along." (v.23)
 1. The "brothers" who accompanied Peter were six "circumcised believers" (see Acts 10:45; 11:12).
 2. God made sure there were a number of eyewitnesses to what was about to happen in Caesarea.
- B. Cornelius fell at Peter's feet in reverence, but Peter humbly refused such treatment (vv.25-26).
 1. Worship is never fitting for men or angels— if only the self-appointed papal "successors" of Peter would forbid their followers to kneel before them!

2. As he had previously done after the healing of the lame beggar (Acts 3:12), Peter quickly deflected any praise or worship, commanding Cornelius: “Stand up,” he said, I am only a man myself.”
- C. “You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But **God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean.**” (v.28)
1. Peter reminded his audience that he would not ordinarily have visited a Gentile house like this one.
 2. Peter recognized that his vision had deeper significance than declaring all *foods* clean—he understood that God had now broken down the barrier between Jew and Gentile:

Eph. 2:11-19: *¹¹Therefore, remember that formerly **you who are Gentiles** by birth and called “**uncircumcised**” by those who call themselves “**the circumcision**” (that done in the body by the hands of men)—¹²remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. ¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. ¹⁴For He Himself is our peace, who has **made the two one and has destroyed the barrier**, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵by abolishing in His flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to **create in Himself one new man out of the two**, thus making peace, ¹⁶and in this **one body** to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which He put to death their hostility. ¹⁷He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸For through Him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. ¹⁹Consequently, you are **no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household...***
- D. Cornelius explained his vision and why he had asked Peter to come and address the gathering in his house (vv.29-33).

IV. GENTILES HEAR THE GOOD NEWS

³⁴Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism ³⁵but accepts men from every nation who

fear him and do what is right. ³⁶You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. ³⁷You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached—³⁸how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how He went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with Him.

³⁹“We are witnesses of everything He did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed Him by hanging Him on a tree, ⁴⁰but God raised Him from the dead on the third day and caused Him to be seen. ⁴¹He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with Him after He rose from the dead. ⁴²He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that He is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³All the prophets testify about Him that everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name.”

- A. “Then Peter began to speak: ‘I now realize how true it is that **God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation** who fear him and do what is right.’” (vv.34-35)
1. This was a profound statement, for Peter and all of the Jewish people had believed for centuries that *they* alone were God’s favored people (and rightly so)—but something had changed dramatically—God would now accept men **from every nation!**
 2. Contrary to what some teach, Peter was *NOT* saying that all God-fearing, righteous men and women (like Cornelius) are automatically saved apart from knowledge of Jesus Christ and faith in His substitutionary sacrifice—Cornelius and his household needed to first hear the message of the gospel in order to be saved (see Acts 11:14).
 3. Even if a man fears God and works righteousness, he is not thereby saved. Salvation is only by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. But when God finds a man who has lived up to the light he has received about the Lord, He makes sure that the man hears the gospel and thus has the opportunity to be saved.

- B. Acts 10:36-43 marks the fifth and final sermon of Peter recorded for us in the Book of Acts, containing many of the same elements already noted in previous sermons:
1. The message of the gospel had been sent *first* to the people of Israel, although the residents of Caesarea had undoubtedly heard about the fame of Christ as well (v.36).
 2. Jesus is Lord of all and God's anointed One—He brought good news of peace, doing good and healing everyone (vv.37-38).
 3. The Jews killed Jesus, but God raised Him from the dead, and we are witnesses (vv.39-41).
 4. All the prophets testified about Jesus, and God has appointed Him as Judge of all (vv.42-43).
 5. Now *everyone* (not just Jews) who believe in Him will receive forgiveness of sins through His name (v.43).

V. THE HOLY SPIRIT FALLS ON THE GENTILES

⁴⁴While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. ⁴⁵The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. ⁴⁶For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said, ⁴⁷“Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.” ⁴⁸So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.

- A. “While Peter was still speaking these words, the **Holy Spirit came on all** who heard the message.” (v.44)
1. “While Peter was still speaking...” – no altar call was made, no hands were laid, no soft background music was playing—the Holy Spirit fell on everyone!
 2. “Came on” [Gk. *epiipto* = “to seize (with more or less violence): to fall (on, upon), lie on, press upon”]—similar to what happened on the day of Pentecost, as Peter would later explain (see Acts 11:15).
- B. “The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were **astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles.**” (v.45)

1. “Astonished” [Gk. *existemi* = “to be put out of wits, or become astounded, insane: to be amazed, surprised, beside oneself”].
2. Cornelius and the others had not become Jewish proselytes—these were uncircumcised Gentiles filled with the Spirit of God—this was absolutely crazy!
3. The early Jewish Christians were very slow to understand or accept that the gospel was for the Gentiles as well as for the Jews.
4. Paul would later write that this was a “mystery” understood only by revelation:

Eph. 3:2-6: *²Surely you have heard about the administration of God’s grace that was given to me for you, ³that is, the **mystery made known to me by revelation**, as I have already written briefly. ⁴In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵which was **not made known to men in other generations** as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God’s holy apostles and prophets. **This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.***

C. “**For they heard them speaking in tongues** and praising God.” (v.46)

1. How did the Jewish believers know that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been given to the Gentiles?
2. The text clearly states that it was *because* they heard them speaking in tongues.
3. “For” [Gk. *gar* = “assigning a reason (used in argument, explanation or intensification; because, seeing)”].
4. Here again, we see that tongues are given as a sign or evidence of the Holy Spirit (see Mark 16:17; 1 Cor. 14:22).

D. “Can anyone keep these people from being **baptized with water**? They have **received the Holy Spirit just as we have.**” (v.47)

1. God had now made it crystal clear that the *whole* gospel—repentance, salvation, water baptism, and baptism in the Holy Spirit—was for Jew and Gentile alike.
 2. These Gentiles had received the *same gift* of the Holy Spirit (Acts 11:17) in the *same way* that Peter and the other Jewish believers had.
- E. “So **he ordered** [“commanded” – NKJV] **that they be baptized** in the name of Jesus Christ.” (v.48)
1. Even though they had already been accepted by God and filled with His Holy Spirit, they still needed water baptism—the order in which the two experiences occur is not important.
 2. Water baptism is not an option—it is a commandment (see Mat. 28:18-20)—it is the first step of “obedience that comes from faith (Rom. 1:5).
 3. Baptism is “God’s way,” and when people reject it, they are rejecting “God’s purpose for themselves”:

Luke 7:29-30: ²⁹(All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus’ words, acknowledged that God’s way was right, because they had been baptized by John. ³⁰But the Pharisees and experts in the law **rejected God’s purpose** for themselves, **because they had not been baptized** by John.)

Luke 20:1-8: ¹*One day as He was teaching the people in the temple courts and preaching the gospel, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, together with the elders, came up to Him.* ²*“Tell us by **what authority** You are doing these things,” they said. “Who gave You this authority?”* ³*He replied, “I will also ask you a question. Tell me, ⁴**John’s baptism—was it from heaven, or from men?**”* ⁵*They discussed it among themselves and said, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ He will ask, ‘Why didn’t you believe him?’* ⁶*But if we say, ‘From men,’ all the people will stone us, because they are persuaded that John was a prophet.”* ⁷*So they answered, “We don’t know where it was from.”* ⁸*Jesus said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.”*

VI. PETER REPORTS TO THE CHURCH

Acts 11:1-18: *¹The apostles and the brothers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. ²So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him ³and said, “You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.”*

⁴Peter began and explained everything to them precisely as it had happened: ⁵“I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. I saw something like a large sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to where I was. ⁶I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, reptiles, and birds of the air. ⁷Then I heard a voice telling me, “Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.”

⁸“I replied, ‘Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’ ⁹“The voice spoke from heaven a second time, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.’ ¹⁰This happened three times, and then it was all pulled up to heaven again.

¹¹“Right then three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea stopped at the house where I was staying. ¹²The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered the man’s house. ¹³He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, ‘Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. ¹⁴He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.’

¹⁵“As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as He had come on us at the beginning. ¹⁶Then I remembered what the Lord had said: “John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ ¹⁷So if God gave them the same gift as He gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?”

¹⁸When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, “So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life.”

A. **“The apostles and the brothers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God.” (v.1)**

1. This was no small news, and as expected, it created quite a stir amongst the Jewish believers.

2. After centuries, God was now letting non-Jewish “outsiders” enter “in!”
- B. “So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the **circumcised believers criticized him** and said, ‘You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.’” (vv.2-3)
1. Not only did Peter go into a Gentile house, but he had entertained Gentile guests in his own house (Acts 10:23)!
 2. We continue to see the difficulty with which the Jewish people—even Spirit-baptized believers—had in accepting God’s New Covenant, all-inclusive salvation by grace.
- C. “Peter began and explained everything to them precisely as it had happened.” (vv.4-13)
1. In defending his actions, Peter laid out a careful step-by-step account of his vision of the sheet, Cornelius’ visitation by an angel, the arrival of the messengers sent by Cornelius, the Holy Spirit’s command to accompany them, and the pouring out of the Spirit on all of those gathered to listen to Peter’s message of salvation.
 2. He did this to demonstrate how God had worked in so many definite and yet distinct ways.
- D. “He will bring you a message through which **you and all your household will be saved.**” (v.14)
1. As pointed out earlier, this is a clear indication that Cornelius (and others in his household), though God-fearing and righteous, *still* needed to hear the gospel and be saved.
 2. Paul summarizes this very nicely in **Rom. 10:12-15**:
*¹²For there is **no difference between Jew and Gentile**—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on Him, ¹³for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” ¹⁴How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And **how can they hear without someone preaching to them?** ¹⁵And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”*

- E. “As I began to speak, **the Holy Spirit came on them as He had come on us at the beginning**. Then I remembered what the Lord had said: ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’” (vv.15-16)
1. “As I began to speak” – in Acts 10, it appears that Peter had been speaking some time before the Holy Spirit fell on them; apparently, he was interrupted before he proceeded very far in his message.
 2. “As He had come on us at the beginning” – just like Pentecost, which Peter refers to as “the beginning;” the outpouring of the Holy Spirit *was* the **beginning** of the church.
 3. Peter realized that what happened at Pentecost was only a partial fulfillment of the Lord’s promise—it now included all Gentiles.
- F. “So if **God gave them the same gift as He gave us**, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?” (v.17)
1. “The same gift” – Cornelius and the other Gentiles had received the exact same gift that Peter and the 120 had received on the day of Pentecost; it was the same power, the same anointing!
 2. Peter could not deny the Gentiles the invitation to be baptized and enjoy fellowship in Christ with all believers; the Jewish believers were now compelled to recognize that God was going to save Gentiles on equal terms with Jews.
 3. The door of grace was opened to the Gentiles, not by human decision, but by God’s supernatural act of pouring out His Spirit upon them.
- G. “When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, ‘So then, **God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life**.’” (v.18)
1. Clearly, the Holy Spirit was at work—upon hearing Peter’s account and recognizing the hand of God in all that had taken place, the circumcised believers did a complete turnaround—they went from criticizing to praising!

2. God grants repentance – even repentance is a gift from God; without the gracious operation of God in the heart of a sinner, he is unable to turn from his sins:

2 Tim. 2:24-26: ²⁴*And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. ²⁵Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, **in the hope that God will grant them repentance** leading them to a knowledge of the truth, ²⁶and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.*

3. “Repentance unto life” – only repentance leads to life—all other paths end in death.

VII. THE CHURCH IN ANTIOCH

Acts 11:19-30: ¹⁹*Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews. ²⁰Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. ²¹The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.*

²²*News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. ²³When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. ²⁴He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.*

²⁵*Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, ²⁶and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.*

²⁷*During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. ²⁸One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) ²⁹The disciples, each according to his ability,*

decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea. ³⁰*This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.*

- A. “Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, **telling the message only to Jews.**” (v.19)
1. Those scattered from Jerusalem by the persecution in Acts chapter 8 had spread further and further out from home.
 2. Although they were outwardly following the letter of the Lord’s command in Acts 1:8 to go to the ends of the earth with the gospel, they were still clinging to their belief that salvation was *only* for the Jews.
- B. “Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and **began to speak to Greeks** also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.” (vv.20-21)
1. Other believers from Cyprus and Cyrene, however, began to preach the gospel to Greeks in Antioch.
 2. God blessed and confirmed their ministry with abundant fruit—many Gentiles were coming to faith in Christ.
 3. The introduction of Christianity to the city of Antioch was an important step in the advance of the church; Antioch was the third city of the Roman Empire (after Rome and Alexandria), and the first largely Gentile church was located there—a church that would serve as Paul’s base of operation from which his three missionary journeys would be launched.
- C. When news of the revival in Antioch reached the church at Jerusalem, they **sent Barnabas to Antioch.** “When he arrived and **saw the evidence of the grace of God**, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.” (vv.22-24)
1. He saw the evidence of the grace of God working in the believers’ lives.

2. Here we see why the apostles had nicknamed him Barnabas or “Son of Encouragement” (Acts 4:36)—he brought great encouragement to the church in Antioch and many more were added to the church there through his ministry.

D. “Then **Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul**, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people.” (vv.25-26)

1. It was Barnabas who had first introduced Saul to the apostles in Jerusalem and convinced them that he (Saul) was a true disciple (Acts 9:26-27)
2. Barnabas seemed to have a special kinship with Saul, and the two would minister and travel together until their disagreement and separation in Acts 15:36-40.
3. Barnabas brought Saul to Antioch—out of obscurity into a more public station. This shows something very precious about Barnabas’ character. Saul, a more popular preacher, called the “chief speaker” in Acts 14:12, would very likely eclipse Barnabas’ ministry, outshining him; but this was of no concern to humble Barnabas—he was very willing to be eclipsed if it meant greater blessing and benefit for the church of God!
4. NOTE: There is an interesting progression from Acts 11 through Acts 15 where the order in which the two names are mentioned is reversed: “*Barnabas and Saul*” (11:26,30; 12:25; 13:1-2,7) to “*Paul and Barnabas*” (13:42-43,46,50; 14:1,3,23; 15:2,22,35).
5. Barnabas had no difficulty in esteeming Saul better than himself and wasn’t, like so many preachers today, threatened by others more gifted than himself. Human pride never likes to play second fiddle, as so graphically portrayed in the pathetic character of King Saul in the Old Testament:

1 Sam. 18:6-10: *⁶When the men were returning home after David had killed the Philistine, the women came out from all the towns of Israel to meet King Saul with singing and dancing, with joyful songs and with tambourines and lutes. ⁷As they danced, they sang: “Saul has slain his thousands,*

and David his tens of thousands.”⁸ Saul was very angry; this refrain galled him. “They have credited David with tens of thousands,” he thought, “but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom?”⁹ And from that time on Saul kept a jealous eye on David.¹⁰ The next day an evil spirit from God came forcefully upon Saul.

6. God help us to rejoice if others have greater capacities, larger opportunities, and do more good than we can do.
7. Barnabas and Saul remained in Antioch, teaching the church for a full year.

E. “The **disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.**” (v.26)

1. Whether adopted by believers or, as is more likely, invented by enemies as a term of reproach, “Christian” is an apt title for one “belonging to Christ” or “a follower of Christ;” “Christ” literally means “anointed,” so true Christian are “anointed ones”—they have His same anointing (see 1 John 2:20, 27; 2 Cor. 1:21).
2. The term “Christian” is found elsewhere in Scripture only in Acts 26:28 and 1 Peter 4:16.

F. Agabus prophesied famine, and aid was sent to Judea (vv.27-30)

1. Although Antioch became the center of the Gentile church, they remained in close fellowship with Jerusalem and the Jewish church there, as evidenced by the fact that “**prophets** came down from Jerusalem to Antioch” (v.27).
2. This is the first mention of prophets in the church, although prophecy was an important part of Joel’s prophecy concerning the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:17-18). New Testament prophets preach, exhort, explain or, as with Agabus, foretell (see Acts 13:1; 15:32; 19:6; 21:9-10); Agabus would later foretell Paul’s imprisonment (Acts 21:10).
3. Barnabas and Saul would deliver the aid to the *elders* in Judea—this is the first mention of “elders” in Acts.

VIII. JAMES KILLED AND PETER IMPRISONED

Acts 12:1-5: ¹*It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them.* ²*He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword.* ³*When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Feast of Unleavened Bread.* ⁴*After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover.* ⁵*So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.*

- A. King Herod puts James to death (vv.1-2)
1. Satan's relentless attacks on the church continued. This time the persecution came from Herod the king—Herod Agrippa I, a grandson of Herod the Great.
 2. He was appointed king over Judea by the Roman Emperor, Claudius. An observer of the Law of Moses, he went to great lengths to please the Jews. It was in pursuance of this policy that he harassed some from the church and killed James the brother of John with the sword.
 3. Historians place James' death about 10 years after Christ's death and resurrection.
- B. The Jews responded so enthusiastically to the execution of James that Herod was encouraged to do the same with Peter (vv.3-4).
1. Herod would wait until Passover was finished to bring Peter out of prison for public trial.
 2. Meanwhile, Peter was guarded by 16 soldiers in prison.
- C. “The **church was earnestly praying** to God for him.” (v.5)
1. By no coincidence, James and Peter, both servants of the same God would meet very different fates at the hand of King Herod—even though it was certainly Herod's intention to have both executed.
 2. Here we are confronted with the mystery of God's will (Eph. 1:9) and the fact that we simply cannot comprehend His ways: James would be put to death and Peter would be rescued. Why? There is no explanation except perhaps the following:

- a) **Ps. 135:6:** *The LORD does whatever pleases Him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths.*
 - b) **Isa. 55:8-9:** ⁸*“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,” declares the LORD.* ⁹*“As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.”*
 - c) **Rom. 11:33-34 (NKJV):** ³³*Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!* ³⁴*“FOR WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD? OR WHO HAS BECOME HIS COUNSELOR?”*
3. Prayer itself is a mystery—God doesn’t always seem to “answer” our prayers the way we expected; nevertheless, after James’ execution, the church prayed earnestly for Peter.
 4. NOTE: There is no mention of the church praying for James when he was arrested; perhaps they had become a bit complacent or apathetic, but after his death, they prayed earnestly for Peter! Sometimes God allows trouble or tragedy to stir us up out of our slumber.

IX. PETER’S MIRACULOUS RESCUE

Acts 12:6-19: ⁶*The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance.* ⁷*Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. “Quick, get up!” he said, and the chains fell off Peter’s wrists.*

⁸*Then the angel said to him, “Put on your clothes and sandals.” And Peter did so. “Wrap your cloak around you and follow me,” the angel told him.* ⁹*Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision.* ¹⁰*They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him.*

¹¹Then Peter came to himself and said, “Now I know without a doubt that the Lord sent his angel and rescued me from Herod’s clutches and from everything the Jewish people were anticipating.”

¹²When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying. ¹³Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer the door. ¹⁴When she recognized Peter’s voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, “Peter is at the door!” ¹⁵“You’re out of your mind,” they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, “It must be his angel.”

¹⁶But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. ¹⁷Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. “Tell James and the brothers about this,” he said, and then he left for another place.

¹⁸In the morning, there was no small commotion among the soldiers as to what had become of Peter. ¹⁹After Herod had a thorough search made for him and did not find him, he cross-examined the guards and ordered that they be executed.

- A. **“The night before** Herod was to bring him to trial, **Peter was sleeping.”** (v.6)
1. In the natural, this was likely Peter’s last night in the land of the living!
 2. But behold his assurance of faith, his peace in the storm—like Christ in the storm (Mark 4:37-38), he was sleeping!
 3. Perhaps Peter remembered the Lord's promise that he would live to be an old man (John 21:18), and so he knew that Herod could not kill him prematurely.
- B. An angel of the Lord miraculously rescued Peter from prison (vv.7-11)
1. At first, Peter thought he was seeing a vision (v.9).
 2. Finally, he came to himself and realized an angel had really appeared and rescued him (v.11).
- C. “When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying.” (v.12)

1. Peter instinctively went to the home of the mother of John Mark, the author of the Gospel of Mark.
 2. This must have been an all-night prayer meeting, since Peter's escape took place in the middle of the night.
- D. "Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer the door. When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, 'Peter is at the door!'" (vv.13-14)
1. The girl was so excited she forgot to let Peter in!
 2. She wanted everyone in the house to know that God had answered their prayers.
- E. But they all thought she was crazy and dismissed her, explaining that it must have been Peter's guardian angel that she saw (v.15).
1. This is a very familiar and oft-repeated scene in Christian circles: when their prayers were answered, they were so surprised that they couldn't believe it!
 2. And before we are too quick to jump all over these believers for their unbelieving prayers, let's admit we've done the same—God in His mercy answered our faithless prayers and we had so little faith that we couldn't even believe it when God's answer came!
- F. When they finally let Peter in, they realized God had miraculously delivered him (and answered their prayers!), and they were all astonished (v.16).
- G. After describing how the Lord had rescued him, Peter told them to **tell James and the brothers** about what had happened (v.17)
1. The apostle James—the son of Zebedee and brother of the apostle John—had been executed by Herod (v.2).
 2. This was another James—the Lord's brother (Mat. 13:55), an apostle and leader in the Jerusalem church (Gal. 1:19; 2:9; Acts 15:13; 21:18).
- H. Unable to account for Peter's disappearance, the poor soldiers guarding him were all executed by Herod (vv.18-19).

X. HEROD'S DEATH

Acts 12:19-25: *Then Herod went from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there a while. ²⁰He had been quarreling with the people of Tyre and Sidon; they now joined together and sought an audience with him. Having secured the support of Blastus, a trusted personal servant of the king, they asked for peace, because they depended on the king's country for their food supply.*

²¹*On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. ²²They shouted, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man." ²³Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died.*

²⁴*But the word of God continued to increase and spread. ²⁵When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark.*

- A. For some unknown reason, there was strife between Herod and the people of Tyre and Sidon, so the people asked for peace and requested a meeting with Herod (vv.19-20).
- B. Appearing in all of his royal finery, Herod gave a speech that so thrilled the people they shouted, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man." (v.22)
- C. Herod, however, made no attempt to refuse such divine honors or give any glory to God—the Lord struck him down, he was eaten of worms and died (v.23).

1. **Gal. 6:7:** *Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.*

2. The one who arrogantly *thought* he had all power failed to learn the lesson of history, particularly that of King Nebuchadnezzar:

Dan. 5:19-20: [Daniel]: ¹⁹*Because of the high position He gave him [Nebuchadnezzar], all the peoples and nations and men of every language dreaded and feared him. **Those the king wanted to put to death, he put to death; those he wanted to spare, he spared; those he wanted to promote, he promoted; and those he wanted to humble, he humbled.***

²⁰*But when his heart became arrogant and hardened with pride, he was deposed from his royal throne and stripped of his glory.*

3. Herod killed one of the Lord's apostles, but was slain by the One who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell:
 - a) **Luke 12:4-5:** *⁴I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. ⁵But I will show you whom you should fear: **Fear Him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear Him.***
 - b) **Heb. 10:30-31:** *³⁰For we know Him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," and again, "The Lord will judge His people." ³¹**It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.***

D. **"But the word of God continued to increase and spread."**
(v.24)

1. This is Luke's third progress report in Acts (Acts 6:7; 9:31); three more follow (Acts 16:5; 19:20; 28:31).
2. This has now become a familiar refrain in the Book of Acts: revival, opposition, persecution, and then *more* growth—how this infuriates the devil!
3. Persecution has never put out the flames of revival—quite the contrary—it only stokes the fire and spreads it further!

E. "When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark." (v.25)

1. After delivering the gift from the Antioch church (see Acts 11:30), Barnabas and Saul returned to Antioch.
2. They took with them John Mark, the nephew of Barnabas, who later wrote the Gospel bearing his name; he would accompany Barnabas and Saul on part of their first missionary journey, but would also lead to their disagreement and separation (Acts 15:37-40).
3. NOTE: It is impossible to know whether Barnabas and Saul were in Jerusalem at the time of the death of James, the imprisonment of Peter, or the death of Herod.

XI. CONCLUSION

- A. The Jewish believers were slow to understand or accept the sweeping changes that God was bringing in this new dispensation of grace called the New Covenant.
- B. After the day of Pentecost, the church was essentially a Jewish church that remained in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria for more than ten years, despite the Lord's command to go the "ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).
- C. Finally (and reluctantly!), Peter was convinced through a vision and by the Holy Spirit to go to the Gentiles in Caesarea with the gospel.
- D. The Holy Spirit fell and revival broke out, and soon the church in Antioch was established and would eventually become the hub of Gentile gospel outreach.
- E. Persecution broke out in Jerusalem again, resulting in the church's second named martyr, James the brother of John; Peter would also be arrested, but would be miraculously rescued by an angel.
- F. Many Bible commentators feel that chapter 12 marks a distinct break in the Book of Acts, some even calling chapters 13-28 volume 2 of Acts. The apostle Peter would only be mentioned one more time in connection with the Jerusalem council in Acts 15, and the apostle Paul would now come to the forefront of action. Antioch would be the headquarters of the Gentile church and center from which the gospel would continue to spread further outward.