

Review

- In Acts 9 and 10 we saw Peter's miraculous ministry in Judea.
- Acts 10 is one of the main turning points in the entire history of Christianity.
- To begin the process of bringing Gentiles into the Church, God intervened through a series of revelations to Peter and the Roman centurion Cornelius.
- Peter realized that God would accept any kind of person.
- The “Gentile Pentecost” was astonishing to Peter and the Jewish men who were with him. Up until this time, they would have thought that a person would first have to become Jewish to believe in Jesus.
- Peter commanded them to be baptized since God had approved of them.

The Jewish Believers Respond (Acts 11:1-18)

1 Now the apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. 2 And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him, 3 saying, “You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!” 4 But Peter explained it to them in order from the beginning, saying: 5 “I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, an object descending like a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came to me. 6 When I observed it intently and considered, I saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air.

7 And I heard a voice saying to me, 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat.' 8 But I said, 'Not so, Lord! For nothing common or unclean has at any time entered my mouth.' 9 But the voice answered me again from heaven, 'What God has cleansed you must not call common.' 10 Now this was done three times, and all were drawn up again into heaven. 11 At that very moment, three men stood before the house where I was, having been sent to me from Caesarea. 12 Then the Spirit told me to go with them, doubting nothing. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered the man's house. 13 And he told us how he had seen an angel standing in his house, who said to him, 'Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter, 14 who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved.' 15 And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning. 16 Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, 'John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' 17 If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?" 18 When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, "Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life."

- Peter gets into a dispute with those who were of the circumcision. We can't tell whether Luke means that all the Jews were debating with Peter on this, or a certain group. Eventually a hard-core group will insist on circumcision.
- They are upset with Peter for going into the home of uncircumcised people and eating with them!
- Peter will recite for them what happened, with some additional details for us.

- Notice the good leadership here on the part of Peter.
- He argues from his experience, his own sense of leading by the Spirit, the testimony of the Jewish men he brought with him, and Scripture. They then realized that God was also opening the door of life to the Gentiles.
- Peter had told Cornelius and his friends that whoever believes in Jesus will receive remission of sins. Peter and the other Jewish believers had to open their minds just a little bit wider and realize that *whoever* means *whoever*.

Preaching To Gentiles (11:19-21)

19 Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only. 20 But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus. 21 And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.

- Luke tells us about mission to Gentiles being done deliberately for the first time. People fleeing the persecution after Stephen’s death went into different areas.
- Phoenicia is north of Galilee, roughly today’s Lebanon. Cyprus is an island maybe 100 miles offshore from Syria.
- The metropolis of Antioch will end up being the center of Christianity in the east. Antioch was the capital of Syria, and with a population of about 500,000 people it was the third largest city in the Roman Empire. There were least 25,000 Jews there, perhaps as many as 60,000.



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- The people fleeing persecution were preaching Jesus only to the Jews.
- However, some preached to the Hellenists, which most people think refers to people of Greek culture in general – in other words, *Gentiles* of Greek culture. This is the first organized attempt to reach non-Jews with the Gospel.
- Luke says that *the hand of the Lord* was with these missionaries. This indicates that God was moving in supernatural power.

The Encourager On Mission (11:22-26)

22 Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch. 23 When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord. 24 For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. 25 Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. 26 And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.

- This time the Church did not send out apostles, they sent Barnabas.
- The result is another of Luke's typical recaps in which he tells us how much the Church is growing. God was moving in one of the largest and darkest cities!
- What comes next is highly significant: Barnabas decides to go and seek Saul. He obviously knew that Saul was very talented, very gifted, and had been called and commissioned by Jesus Himself to reach the Gentile world. After eight or ten years since Saul had been sent back home, it's the right time for him to step into the fullness of his ministry.
- They labor together for a year before God would send them out together.
- The disciples were first called Christians there in Antioch. This was not a friendly name; it was probably a mocking name given by opponents.
- Before this, believers in Jesus were known as disciples, or brothers, or followers of the Way. The Jews came to call them Nazarenes, as Christians are still called in Hebrew even today.

- In the Roman world, groups of people might be named after their leaders, or soldiers named after their general. Christians were followers of *Christos*, and it seemed natural to say, “Here come those Christ-people, those *Christianoi*.”

The Famine (11:27-30)

27 And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar. 29 Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. 30 This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

- Agabus is one of several people described as a prophet in *Acts*. We know that there was a series of bad harvests across the Empire in the 40’s AD, and that Judea was hit hard around the year 46 AD.
- Faith in Jesus that doesn’t motivate us to reach out and help our brethren in need is a poor kind of faith!
- Notice that the apostles were not mentioned here. Perhaps they were now beginning to fan out across the Roman world, and even beyond.

Martyrdom And Peter Arrested (12:1-5)

1 Now about that time Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some from the church. 2 Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword. 3 And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. Now it was during the Days of Unleavened Bread. 4 So when he had arrested him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four squads of soldiers to keep him, intending to bring him before the people after Passover. 5 Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church.

- This is the first martyrdom of one of the apostles. This is probably a “flashback.”
- When reading the New Testament, it’s helpful to “have a handle on the Herods.”
 - Herod the Great ordered the “Massacre of the Innocents” in the Christmas story. He ruled over Judea, Galilee, and other nearby areas.
 - Next came Herod Antipas, who was involved in the death of both John the Baptist and Jesus. He died in 39 AD.
 - Next came Herod Agrippa, the king in Acts 12. He died in 44 AD.
 - The final Herod was Herod Agrippa II, to whom Paul preached.

- This Herod, Agrippa I, arrested Peter, and Peter was held by four squads of four.
- Herod apparently wanted to please the Jewish leaders by going after some of the ringleaders of the Nazarenes.
- Should we read anything into Luke’s statement that the Church prayed constantly when Peter was arrested?

Peter Rescued (12:6-19)

6 And when Herod was about to bring him out, that night Peter was sleeping, bound with two chains between two soldiers; and the guards before the door were keeping the prison. 7 Now behold, an angel of the Lord stood by him, and a light shone in the prison; and he struck Peter on the side and raised him up, saying, "Arise quickly!" And his chains fell off his hands. 8 Then the angel said to him, "Gird yourself and tie on your sandals"; and so he did. And he said to him, "Put on your garment and follow me." 9 So he went out and followed him, and did not know that what was done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. 10 When they were past the first and the second guard posts, they came to the iron gate that leads to the city, which opened to them of its own accord; and they went out and went down one street, and immediately the angel departed from him.

11 And when Peter had come to himself, he said, "Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent His angel, and has delivered me from the hand of Herod and from all the expectation of the Jewish people."

12 So, when he had considered this, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying. 13 And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a girl named Rhoda came to answer. 14 When she recognized Peter's voice, because of her gladness she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter stood before the gate. 15 But they said to her, "You are beside yourself!" Yet she kept insisting that it was so. So they said, "It is his angel." 16 Now Peter continued knocking; and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. 17 But motioning to them with his hand to keep silent, he declared to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, "Go, tell these things to James and to the brethren." And he departed and went to another place.

18 Then, as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers about what had become of Peter. 19 But when Herod had searched for him and not found him, he examined the guards and commanded that they should be put to death. And he went down from Judea to Caesarea, and stayed there.

- Peter seems to have learned from Jesus to trust the Lord.
- Peter comes to the house of Mary, which seems to have been close to the prison, probably the king's fortress near the Temple.
- Perhaps Mary's house was a well-known meeting spot for the believers.
- The people had faith... but maybe not too much!
- After Peter's deliverance, he seems to have gone into hiding. James seems to have been the primary leader in Jerusalem at this time.

Herod's End (12:20-25)

20 Now Herod had been very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; but they came to him with one accord, and having made Blastus the king's personal aide their friend, they asked for peace, because their country was supplied with food by the king's country. 21 So on a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat on his throne and gave an oration to them. 22 And the people kept shouting, "The voice of a god and not of a man!" 23 Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died. 24 But the word of God grew and multiplied. 25 And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their ministry, and they also took with them John whose surname was Mark.

- Agrippa was eaten by worms, but the Word of God grew and multiplied!
- Barnabas, Saul, and Mark will soon head out on their first missionary journey.
