

The Extension of the Church

LESSON 7



Topic

The gospel

Theme

Sharing the gospel forces believers to think God's way about the lost.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will accept that through the gospel all people have equal access to the blessings of God.

Materials

• Resources 1, 2, 8, and 9

Scripture Focus

Acts 9:32–12:24

Summary

Lesson 7 focuses attention on Peter's ministry outside Jerusalem with special attention to his ministry among Gentiles. The lesson also presents the continual growth of the church with the growing presence of the church at Antioch.

Outline

I. Peter Ministers in Samaria (9:32–10:48)

- A. Peter's ministry in Lydda (9:32–35)
- B. Peter's ministry in Joppa (9:36–43)

II. God Calls Peter to Minister to Gentiles (10:1–48)

- A. Cornelius' person and position (10:1, 2)
- B. Cornelius' vision (10:3–8)
- C. Peter's vision (10:9–16)
- D. Peter's visit to Cornelius (10:17–33)
- E. Peter's message to Cornelius (10:34–43)
- F. Giving of the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles (10:44–48)

III. Peter Reports to the Church in Jerusalem (11:1–18)

- A. Jewish believers confront Peter (11:1–3)
- B. Peter conveys God's plan for the gospel (11:4–18)

IV. The Antioch Church Grows (11:19–30)

- A. In their outreach to Gentiles (11:19–26)
- B. In their care for Jerusalem Jews (11:27–30)

V. The Persecution of the Church at Jerusalem (12:1–24)

Memory Verse

"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?"
(Acts 11:17).

GETTING STARTED

Review of Lesson 6

ASK: What progress have you made on your response regarding hard-to-reach or seemingly unreachable people? Tell your learners that having a proper attitude toward and praying for those formerly outside their concern may be all they can do at present. Opportunities and the skills needed to take advantage of them may come later.

List of Obstacles

Invite your learners to share common obstacles to witnessing to hard-to-reach people. (Obstacles could include language, culture, skills, opportunities, and the like.) (Q1) Record this list on the board.

Share with your learners that today's study will focus on how God prepared Peter to minister to people once outside his care and concern. What Peter learned can be of help to us in our own witnessing, especially to hard-to-reach people.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. Peter Ministers in Samaria (9:32–10:48)

With Paul home in Tarsus, Luke turned his attention back to Peter and his ministry. Specifically, he reported how Peter publicly evangelized the first recorded group of Gentiles.

A. Peter's ministry in Lydda (9:32–35)

MAP: Display resource 8 to show Peter's travels as you cover them.

While Peter was a central figure in the early church, Luke never described him as the head or resident leader of the church at Jerusalem. In fact, Peter had a rather itinerant type of ministry. He was only one of twelve apostles, all of whom had received a distinct ministry from the Lord.

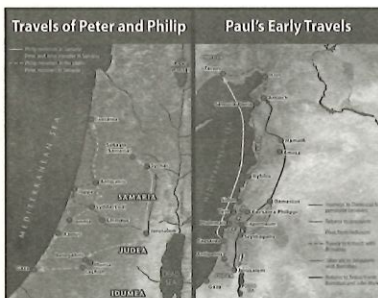
Lydda was located in the fertile coastal plain of Sharon, about twenty-five miles northwest of Jerusalem. We have no record of how the gospel reached that area, only that believers lived in the area (9:32).

While in Lydda, Peter met a paralytic man named Aeneas, who had been bed-ridden for eight years (9:33). Aeneas is a Greek name, indicating that the man was probably a Hellenistic Jew.

ASK: Where might you find the physically ill and needy in your community? (Q3)

ASK: What might be some opportunities to reach them? (Q4)

Without request from Aeneas, Peter instantly and completely healed the man by calling on the name of Jesus (9:34). Peter had similarly healed a paralytic (3:6–8). Perhaps Luke recorded the second healing miracle to illustrate that as



the gospel witness expanded outside Jerusalem, it did so with equal power to that within Jerusalem. By making this point, Luke was slowly preparing the reader for the spread of the gospel to *the uttermost part of the earth* and the salvation of Gentiles outside Jerusalem and Judea.

READ: Acts 9:35. **ASK:** What was the greatest miracle that occurred in Lydda under Peter's ministry? (Q5) *People trusted in Christ as their Savior.*

B. Peter's ministry in Joppa (9:36–43)

While Peter was in Lydda, a disciple named Tabitha (Dorcas), who lived in Joppa, became ill and died. Peter traveled the ten miles to Joppa, a four-hour trip by foot. Tabitha had a good reputation among the people in her town. She had used her talent of sewing to minister to the needs of many (9:39).

Upon entering Tabitha's room, Peter prayed and used her Aramaic name: *Tabitha, arise* (9:40). The Aramaic phrase *Tabitha koum* is almost identical with what Jesus said in Mark 5:41 when He raised Jairus' daughter and said, *Talitha cumi*, or *Little girl, arise*. Perhaps Luke was intentionally connecting Peter's power to Jesus' power.

While in Joppa, Peter stayed with a tanner named Simon (Acts 9:43). The move is both a geographical and a theological transition to Peter's ministry. Geographically, Peter transitioned from Lydda to Joppa, representing places beyond Jerusalem. Theologically, Peter transitioned from association with Jews only to association with Gentile believers.

Peter's choice of a host in Joppa was unusual, because most Jews considered tanners unclean. Tanners worked with the skins of dead animals. Orthodox Jews would not associate with a tanner or stay in a tanner's home.

ASK: Who are some people believers today would most likely not associate with and would not think to share the gospel with? (Q6) *Those addicted to drugs or alcohol, the incarcerated, the homeless.*

The healing of Aeneas and of Tabitha indicated God's approval of Peter's ministry transition to Hellenistic Jews outside Jerusalem. This transition was leading to a climax .

II. God Calls Peter to Minister to Gentiles (10:1–48)

Peter's experience with Cornelius was so significant that Luke mentioned it in Acts 10, 11, and 15. The experience showed that ritually clean Jews could take the gospel to unclean Gentiles and that Gentiles did not have to become Jewish to receive the gospel. Gentiles were not under the Mosaic dietary laws and laws of circumcision.

A. Cornelius' person and position (10:1, 2)

Cornelius was a centurion of the Italian band (10:1). He served as a noncommissioned officer who commanded about one hundred soldiers in Caesarea. Caesarea, located on the Mediterranean coast about thirty miles north of Joppa, served as a center for Roman government and military affairs. Its population differed greatly from the heavily Jewish populations in Lydda and Joppa.

Although God used the conversion of Cornelius and other Gentiles to fully validate Gentile conversion and acceptance, tension and division over these issues continued throughout Peter's and Paul's ministries.

Cornelius was a *devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway* (10:2). The phrase *feared God* is a technical phrase meaning *God-fearer*. God-fearers were Gentile adherents to the Jewish synagogue. Yet they were not full Jewish proselytes because they had not been circumcised.

ASK: How easy would it have been for Peter to overlook a centurion in the Roman army? (Q7) *Those in the Roman military could have been easily overlooked by Peter. He didn't necessarily want to draw the attention of the Roman military.*

B. Cornelius' vision (10:3–8)

READ: Acts 10:3–8. ASK: Who didn't overlook Cornelius? (Q8) *God.*

Luke was careful to mention that Cornelius' vision occurred at the ninth hour of the day, which is about 3:00 PM. The vision was not a common nighttime dream. Luke also emphasized Cornelius' piety, since Cornelius was praying at the time designated for prayer (3:1). We do not know the content of his prayers, but we do know that God responded and sent an angel to give Cornelius an order (10:4–6).

In response, Cornelius sent two household servants and a soldier, who most certainly were *unclean* Gentiles. Cornelius may have wondered about sending unclean enemies of the Jews to request Peter's presence. But he simply obeyed the angel and sent the three men to retrieve Peter (10:7, 8).

C. Peter's vision (10:9–16)

While Cornelius's men traveled, Peter had a vision at the sixth hour, or about noontime, the next day. The vision came to Peter after he had prayed and become very hungry. Peter saw an object like a sheet from Heaven that contained *all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air* (10:12). In Leviticus 11 the Lord had declared the same animals unclean, meaning the Israelites were not to eat them. Such dietary laws functioned as an Old Covenant method of keeping Israel separate from Gentiles.

Jesus had declared all foods clean (Mark 7:14–19). But Peter didn't accept Jesus' teaching. When the Lord repeatedly asked him to eat of the unclean animals, Peter answered, *Not so, my Lord* (Acts 10:14–16).

ASK: What did Peter's response to the Lord indicate about his view of Jews and Gentiles? (Q9) *He still saw Jews as clean and Gentiles as unclean.*

D. Peter's visit to Cornelius (10:17–33)

Although Peter did not immediately understand the message of the vision, the Spirit directed him to receive the three men from Cornelius (10:19, 20). In fact, the Spirit instructed Peter to allow them into his place of lodging (10:23). Normally Jews did not host Gentiles, but Peter complied. The next day Peter and six other Jewish Christians (11:12) accompanied Cornelius' three men to Cornelius' home.

Cornelius was certain that Peter would come, so he gathered his family and close friends (10:24). When Peter arrived, he assured the Gentiles that God had

spoken to him and that he knew better than to *call any man common or unclean* (10:28). The Gentiles apparently knew that the Jews considered them unclean.

READ: Acts 10:33. **ASK:** Peter's witnessing opportunity in Joppa was orchestrated by God. Does God still orchestrate witnessing opportunities today? Explain. (Q10) *Yes. God directs believers to those who are ready to hear the gospel.*

ASK: Describe an instance when you had a witnessing opportunity suddenly open before you? (Q11)

E. Peter's message to Cornelius (10:34-43)

Peter's message to Cornelius stands as the first message in Acts to address a Gentile audience. Peter's message here is consistent with his other sermons in the book of Acts (cf. 2:14-40; 3:11-26). This similarity reinforces the fact that the gospel does not change to accommodate different people groups.

Peter spoke about Jesus of Nazareth as a Man, about Jesus Christ's full deity and lordship, and about His death and resurrection (10:38-40). He also emphasized the forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus' name (10:44).

The phrase *opened his mouth* signals an important message (10:44). Peter understood the extent of his vision and the fullness of what Jesus had instructed the disciples back in Acts 1:8. He realized God will deal equally with all people through Jesus Christ. Peter demonstrated this truth by stating, *He [Jesus] is Lord of all* (10:36). Since Jesus is Lord of all, He can heal, judge, and forgive sins of everyone, including uncircumcised Gentiles.

ASK: How should you respond to the fact that Jesus is Lord of all? How should it affect how you treat people such as an unsaved neighbor whose dog keeps you up at night? (Q12) *We should seek to maintain our testimony so we don't ruin any opportunities to share the gospel.*

F. Giving of the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles (10:44-48)

Apparently as soon as Cornelius and those with him had enough information about the gospel, they exercised saving faith (10:43). The Holy Spirit then came upon them, the first group of Gentiles to receive the Holy Spirit (10:44). Thus God opened the gospel more broadly to another group. All Gentiles have equal access to the blessings in Christ.

Baptism, the picture of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection and a means of identification with Jesus Christ, follows salvation. The Gentiles' example clearly demonstrates that water baptism is for believers only (10:47, 48). Note the question, *Can any man forbid water?* No one could hinder those new Gentile believers from baptism.

III. Peter Reports to the Church in Jerusalem (11:1-18)

A. Jewish believers confront Peter (11:1-3)

When Peter returned to Jerusalem, his mingling and fellowshiping with the

Gentiles drew sharp criticism from *they that were of the circumcision* (11:2). This group of circumcised Jewish believers probably did not include the apostles. Clearly some in the Jerusalem church did not understand the nature of the church. Rather than understanding the church as a new and different entity, they simply understood the church as a kind of advanced, reformed Judaism.

B. Peter conveys God's plan for the gospel (11:4–18)

In answer to their criticism, Peter recounted the details of his vision, his ministry to the Gentiles, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (11:4–16).

READ: Acts 11:17. **ASK:** What did Peter conclude when he saw the Holy Spirit poured out on the Gentiles? (Q13) *That if God saved the Gentiles, then he had no right to argue with God.*

The Jerusalem church agreed with Peter and glorified God (11:18). Note that Peter's defense did not rest on him or on his actions. Rather his defense rested on the gospel and how God Himself did not differentiate between Jew and Gentile.

IV. The Antioch Church Grows (11:19–30)

A. In their outreach to Gentiles (11:19–26)

Luke shifted his reporting to the church in Antioch of Syria (11:19). Antioch lay about three hundred miles north of Jerusalem. It served as the capital of the Roman province of Syria. Thus Antioch was an important, well-populated city.

Furthermore, Antioch was notorious for moral corruption and wickedness. Its proximity to major cult centers fed its corruption. The cult centers were for the Greek god Daphne, a nymph who is transformed into a laurel tree to escape the pursuing Apollo; the Greek god Apollo, the god of sunlight, prophecy, music, and poetry; and the ancient Phoenician goddess Astarte, the goddess of fertility.

The church at Antioch began when Hellenistic believing Jews fled to Antioch during the persecutions that began with Stephen's death (11:19). Luke reported how this church had been thriving in the midst of an ungodly environment (11:21, 22). Many of the converts were Gentiles.

Barnabas traveled to Antioch when news of the growth reached Jerusalem. Barnabas eventually went to Tarsus to get Saul. They then continued to work together in Antioch for about a year (11:23–26).

Luke added an interesting side note: the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch (11:26). The phrase *were called Christians* suggests that believers did not call themselves Christians. The early church preferred terms such as *believers*, *disciples*, and *brothers* to identify themselves. Many Roman writers used the term *Christian* to designate those who identified themselves with Jesus Christ. Most often they used the term in a disparaging manner.

The use of the term was signified the growth and success of the early church in Antioch and that the general population recognized Christianity as different than Judaism.

B. In their care for Jerusalem Jews (11:27–30)

READ: Acts 11:27–30. **ASK:** What did the predominantly Gentile church in

Antioch do for the predominantly Jewish church in Jerusalem? (Q14) *They provided for their physical needs.*

Prophets from Jerusalem alerted the church in Antioch that a famine was coming. The Antioch church, despite being mainly Gentile, did not hesitate to reach out to the church in Jerusalem. They took a collection and sent it to Jerusalem by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

ASK: How would the gift from Antioch affect the church in Jerusalem? Remember that Jews disparagingly called Gentiles dogs. (Q15) *The gift from the Gentiles would have helped the Jews understand their responsibility to all men regardless of their ethnicity.*

V. The Persecution of the Church at Jerusalem (Acts 12:1–24)

Luke added a brief description of how Herod Agrippa, the grandson of Herod the Great, sought to please the Jews by persecuting believers (12:1–3). Luke again illustrated the truth that no one or thing can stop the church of Jesus Christ. He recorded a series of miraculous interventions (12:4–17) and the death of Herod, whom God Himself struck down (12:20–23).

Luke ended Acts 12 with another progress report.

RESOURCE: Display resource 2 to review the markers in the book of Acts that show nothing could stop Christ from building His church.

MAKING IT PERSONAL

Overlooked

RESOURCE: Display resource 9. **ASK:** Who are some of the lost we tend to overlook? (Q16) *Grocery store clerk, waitress, neighbor, people we don't like, relatives we are not close to, doctors and nurses. (Record answers on the resource.)*

ASK: What are some strategies we could use to help us see people as lost? (Q17) *Create a prayer list of people we come into contact with, ask God for open doors to share the gospel, develop a plan for guiding conversations to the gospel. (Record answers on the resource.)*

Next Step

Ask your learners to write down what they believe is the best next step for them to take to share their gospel message with the people they overlook. Encourage them to include any time, date, or way that seems practical. (Q18)

Review Resource

Use resource 1 to review the response for this lesson: Witness to all people.

Progress in the Book of Acts

Luke gave regular reports of continued church growth:

2:47	6:7	9:31	12:24	16:5	19:20
"and the Lord added to the church"	"and the word of God increased; and the number of disciples multiplied"	"the churches ... were multiplied"	"but the word of God grew and multiplied"	"so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily"	"so mightily grew the word of God"

Nothing can stop Christ from building His Church!

Seeing the Overlooked

The Overlooked	Strategies

The Word Spreads

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Paul's First Missionary Journey



Topic

Missions

Theme

The church is involved in the missionary work of its members.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will commit to faithful prayer for present and future missionaries.

Materials

• Resources 1, 10, and 11

Scripture Focus

Acts 12:25–14:28

Summary

Lesson 8 gives attention to Paul's first missionary journey. The lesson considers the divine commission of Saul and Barnabas, their initial trip and separation, Paul's emergence as God's chosen leader, and his ministry style. The lesson concludes with Paul's report to the Antioch church.

Outline

I. The Divine Commission of Paul and Barnabas (12:25–13:3)

- A. The church at Antioch (13:1–3)
 - 1. Thrived spiritually
 - 2. Understood the Holy Spirit
 - 3. Valued quality leadership
- B. The call to ministry

II. The First Missionary Journey (13:4–14:28)

- A. Ministry in Cyprus (13:4–12)
- B. Ministry in Pamphylia and Pisidian Antioch (13:13–52)
 - 1. Departure of John Mark (13:13)
 - 2. Paul's sermon in the synagogue (13:14–41)
- C. Ministry in Iconium (14:1–5)
- D. Ministry in Lystra and Derbe (14:6–20)
- E. The return to Antioch of Syria (14:21–28)

Memory Verse

"And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles" (Acts 14:27).