

# 12

## CONTROVERSY AND VINDICATION

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### ACTS 11



With what took place in the home of Cornelius, Gentiles were admitted as full members of the new and rapidly developing family of Jesus. *And* they were not made to become Jews in the process! With an uncommon change of pace, Luke slows down to give us the details of Peter's vision and its result *twice*. For Luke, the admission of the Gentiles into God's people, without Jewish prerequisites (i.e. circumcision or avoiding food taboos), is one of the central and most important things he wants the reader to understand. But, just like there were divisions brewing within the Jerusalem community in Acts 6, so now a further and potentially more divisive split is coming. It will cast a long shadow, but the gospel will outshine it.

### REPENTANCE GRANTED (11:1-18)

In Acts 11:1-18, Peter recounts to the apostles and the church in Jerusalem the news of Cornelius's conversion and the Gentiles' reception of the Holy Spirit. In 11:2-3, Peter receives some harsh criticism from the "circumcision party."<sup>1</sup> But for others, their attitudes toward the Gentiles are changing.

1. Like Peter before, the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem were thinking that God still wanted separation between Jews and Gentiles. Looking at verses 4-17, what things changed their understanding?

<sup>1</sup>The **CIRCUMCISION PARTY** Luke mentions in verse 2 consisted of "right wing" Jewish Christians whose centuries-long observance of ritual food laws and the practice of circumcision made fellowship with Gentiles both unlawful and unconscionable. As Christians we side with an entirely new party. It is neither republican nor democrat. Rather, the party with which we must all affiliate as Christians is the faith party ... alone!

2. When have you been criticized for something you did as a Christian ministry to others? What motivated you to do it and how did you respond to the criticism?
3. In verse 18, because of Peter's testimony many Jews respond saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to eternal life". How does this statement inform your understanding of the doctrine of salvation (how God saves people)?

## FIRST "CHRISTIANS" IN ANTIOCH (11:19-30)

Luke now shows how the outward movement of the gospel expanded in two ways, geographically and culturally. Geographically, the mission spread north beyond "Judea and Samaria." Culturally, the mission spread beyond Jews to Gentiles. Some speculate that Luke himself may have been one of these converts.

4. What efforts were made to nurture the new believers at Antioch? What do these efforts say about the importance of discipling young Christians?
5. According to verse 23, Barnabas exhorts the new Gentile Christians to "remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose." What does he mean and how should they (and we) go about it?
6. Why do you think Luke makes a point of mentioning Agabus' prediction of a great famine in verses 27-30? What purpose(s) might this famine serve for the church?

### A LIGHT TO THE NATIONS

God chose Israel to be a people set apart, but they were also to be a blessing to the nations (Gen 12:3; 22:16-18; Isa 42:6; 49:6). God shows Peter how he is bringing Israel's vocation – to be "a light to the nations" – to its fullness by embracing Gentiles through a perfect Israelite: Jesus, the light of the world.