



Authority

EVEN TO THE GENTILES

Acts 11

Teaching Notes

INTRO

The Holy Spirit is moving through each one of us. In Acts 10, the Holy Spirit poured Himself out not only on Cornelius but also Cornelius's whole household. It was the Gentile Pentecost. In Acts 1—9, the gospel had only reached the Jewish people. As word of what happened with Cornelius spread, it began to cause some controversy. People did not like it. Throughout chapter 11, Wiersbe observed three reactions of the Jews to the Gentiles' conversion:

1. They accepted the Gentiles (v. 1–18)
2. They encouraged the Gentiles (v. 19–26)
3. They received help from the Gentiles (v. 27–30)¹

TEACHING

Acts 11:1: All of Judea encompassed an area of about 30 miles. When the Spirit of God moves, even in a social media-less world, word will get out.

Acts 11:2–3: News of what happened spread faster than Peter could travel. By the time he got back to Jerusalem, what happened in Cornelius's house was already known. Some took offense to what Peter did on the grounds that Peter had entered into the home of an uncircumcised man and had eaten with him. The Gentiles were widely considered "dogs" (Matthew 15:26). MacArthur said, "The Jewish believers were outraged over such a blatant breach of Jewish custom."² If Jewish customs were being broken, it meant Peter was messing with their religion. Remember, Wiersbe noted the first time we saw Jews accept Gentiles was in the first 18 verses. Right now, there wasn't a lot of acceptance, but it's interesting to see how we get there.

Acts 11:4–11: Peter explained to his Jewish audience exactly what led up to his journey to Cornelius's house and what happened while he was there. Peter gave several evidences for why, what he had done, was of God. First, Peter related his vision from God (vv. 5–11).³ Peter retold his vision as evidence of God's testimony to him. In doing this, God received the glory for what Peter did. Peter related that he expressed the same reluctance, to accept his vision, that his opponents expressed: he had never eaten or touched anything unclean. But God sent the vision three separate times to reinforce His point. Then, after Peter awoke from the vision, there were three men waiting for him to take him to Cornelius's home.

Acts 11:12–15: The second evidence Peter related to justify his ministry to Cornelius's family was to recount the witness of the Spirit (vv. 12–15).⁴ At the Spirit's prompting, Peter accompanied the six men sent to retrieve him. They travelled about 30 miles together to get to Cornelius's house. When Peter arrived and began to share the gospel with Cornelius's household, Peter visibly witnessed the Holy Spirit come upon them just as it had the group of Jewish believers at Pentecost.

Acts 11:16–18: third evidence Peter related to justify his ministry to Cornelius's family was Peter's witness of the Word (v. 16).⁵ Peter remembered Jesus' teaching that His followers would be "baptized with the Holy Spirit" (v. 16). The phrase "baptized with the Holy Spirit" occurs six other times in the New Testament:

1. "For John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now" (Acts 1:5). The Jews were baptized with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost "not many days" from when Jesus spoke these words.
2. "I baptize you with water for repentance, but the One who is coming after me is more powerful than I. I am not worthy to remove His sandals. He Himself will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Matthew 3:11). Here, baptism of the Spirit was related to a baptism of fire. While this is mostly associated with speaking in tongues, it more broadly references the presence of God that comes in to burn away the dross of your life to prepare you to walk out your spiritual gifts in service to the Lord.
3. "I have baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (Mark 1:8).

¹ Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary, New Testament*, Vol. 1 (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 1989) pp. 447–450.

² John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005), p. 1456.

³ Wiersbe, p. 448.

⁴ Wiersbe, p. 448.

⁵ Wiersbe, p. 448.



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4. “John answered them all, ‘I baptize you with water, but One is coming who is more powerful than I. I am not worthy to untie the strap of His sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire’” (Luke 3:16). John the Baptist said Jesus would do greater things than he did. But Jesus said Christians would do greater things than He did because the Holy Spirit would put the fire of God in our lives.
5. “I didn’t know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘The One you see the Spirit descending and resting on—He is the One who baptizes with the Holy Spirit’” (John 1:33).
6. “For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:13). This verse ties in strongly to Acts 11. All believers, regardless of where we’re from, have been baptized by the Holy Spirit into one body.

Upon hearing Peter’s entire story, the Jewish believers praised God for granting eternal life to the Gentiles. MacArthur noted that this was “one of the most shocking admissions in Jewish history.”⁶ The Jews recognized the Messiah was also for the Gentiles. This very thing had been prophesied (Isaiah 41:1, 6; 49:6).

Acts 11:19–26: The Jewish believers moved from accepting the Gentile believers to encouraging them. After Stephen’s persecution, the Jewish believers who scattered initially only shared the gospel with Jews. Now the gospel spread into Gentile communities in Antioch through two nameless men from Cyprus and Cyrene. Hearing this, the Jerusalem church sent Barnabas to check things out. When he got there, Barnabas “saw the grace of God” (v. 23). He went to retrieve Saul, who we now know as Paul, from Tarsus, and the two of them encouraged and taught the new church in Antioch for the next year.

Acts 11:27–30: After accepting and encouraging the Gentiles, the Jews moved to receiving help from the Gentiles. A prophet from Antioch named Agabus predicted there would be a famine throughout the empire. The disciples in Antioch took up a collection that they sent through their elders to help the believers in Jerusalem. This is evidence of a drastic movement of God. Remember, two nameless men from Cyprus and Cyrene started this whole movement (Romans 15:25–27.)

CLOSING

Acts 11 is summarized well by Paul in Romans 15: “Right now I am travelling to Jerusalem to serve the saints, for Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. Yes, they were pleased, and indeed are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual benefits, then they are obligated to minister to Jews in material needs” (vv. 25–27). The Gentiles in Acts 11 understood their indebtedness to the Jews because of their spiritual heritage. We are under a similar conviction to not neglect the material needs of the Jews.

⁶ MacArthur, p. 1456.