The Acts of the Apostles ~

5. *The Gospel to Gentiles*

*(Acts 9:32-11:18)*

1. Peter’s Ministry as Precursor to the Gentile Mission (9:32-43)

[View the map.]

1. Peter’s Christlike Ministry (vv. 34, 40)

* **There are two parallels and one pointer in Peter’s healings to Christ’s healings and Christ Himself.**
* First Parallel to Christ ~
* Second Parallel to Christ ~
* **Mark 2:11-12** ~ 11 “I say to you, get up, pick up your pallet and go home.” 12 And he got up and immediately picked up the pallet and went out in the sight of everyone, so that they were all amazed and were glorifying God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this.”
* **Mark 5:41-42** ~ Taking the child by the hand, He said to her, “Talitha kum!” (which translated means, “Little girl, I say to you, get up!”). 42 Immediately the girl got up and began to walk, for she was twelve years old. And immediately they were completely astounded.

1. Peter’s Prophetic Ministry (vv. 37, 39)

* **Not only does Peter ministry parallel Christ’s, it also parallels the ministries of two key OT prophets: Elijah and Elisha.**
* Dorcas in the upper room (1 Kgs 17:19 and 2 Kgs 4:10, 21)

1. Peter’s Apostolic Effectiveness (vv. 34, 40)
2. Results of Peter’s Ministry (vv. 35, 42)

* **Peter’s healings lead to mass conversions, a result that followed several of Christ’s healings.**

1. Peter’s Providential Placement (v. 43)

* **Jonah 1:3** ~ But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. So he went down to Joppa, found a ship which was going to Tarshish, paid the fare and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.

1. God’s Guidance in the Firstfruits of the Gentile Mission (10:1-43)
2. ****Guidance by Vision #1 ~ Cornelius and the Angel (10:1-8)****

* Cornelius, the Gentile centurion ~
* “A ‘cohort’ consisted of 600 men under the command of six centurions… “Centurions were paid very well (as much as five times the pay of an ordinary soldier), so Cornelius would have been socially prominent and wealthy.” ~ *ESV Study Bible*
* He is a Gentile sympathizer with Judaism who has adopted its piety. This would be extremely rare among Roman soldiers. (*paraphrase* - Darrell Bock, 386).
* **Point: At the outset of the story, God is providentially guiding Cornelius, a Gentile, to meet Peter, a Jew.**

1. Guidance by Vision #2 ~ Peter and the Sheet (10:9-16)

* Peter, the Jewish apostle ~
* **Lev 20:25-26** ~ 25 ‘You are therefore to make a distinction between the clean animal and the unclean, and between the unclean bird and the clean; and you shall not make yourselves detestable by animal or by bird or by anything that creeps on the ground, which I have separated for you as unclean.
* **By removing unclean/clean distinctions about food that separated Jews from Gentiles, God is now ushering in a new era in which Gentiles are accepted into full fellowship with Jews.**
* “God uses the picture of unclean food now made clean to portray unclean Gentiles now made clean” (Darrell Bock, 390).
* **Rom 14:14** ~ 14 I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself;
* **1 Tim 4:3-5** ~ 3 men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth.4 For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude; 5 for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer.
* **Mark 7:18-20** ~ 18 And He ﻿said to them, “Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him, 19 because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and ﻿is eliminated?” (Thus He declared all foods clean.) 20 And He was saying, “That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man.
* “No orthodox Jew would ever enter the home of a Gentile, even a God-fearer, or invite such into his home (see verse 28).” ~ John Stott, 185
* **Jesus Christ revealed the true purpose of the Law, fulfilled the Law, and thus made it obsolete (a fact which was built into the Law itself!). Now in Christ, there is a definitive physical and spiritual unity between Jews and Gentiles both in belief and practice. Both are made clean through the blood of Christ alone (cf. Gal 3:19-29; Eph 2:11-22).**
* “It [the vision] frees Peter from any scruples about going to a Gentile home and eating whatever might be set before him” (Marshall 1980:186; cited by Bock, 390).

1. Guidance in Timing (10:17-33)

* **Timing #1 ~ Peter and the three men from Cornelius**
* **Timing #2 ~ Cornelius and his relatives**
* **Timing #3 ~ Peter and Cornelius meeting together**
* **John 18:28** ~ 28 ﻿Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas into the Praetorium, and it was early; and they themselves did not enter into the Praetorium so that they would not be defiled, but might eat the Passover.
* **Point: God is among them as He has been all throughout the process to bring these two men together in this specific moment “to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord” (v. 33).**

1. Guidance by the Holy Spirit (10:34-48)

* **Point: The last form of guidance takes place through God’s outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Gentiles to confirm their salvation by Jesus Christ (v. 44).**
* **(1) First, Peter opens his message by firmly demonstrating that he grasps God’s message to him in the vision of the sheet.**
* **Deut 10:17-19** ~ 17 “For the Lord your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality nor take a bribe. 18 “He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing. 19 “So show your love for the alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.
* **(2) He calls his message, “The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all) –” (v. 36)**
* **(3) He recounts the ministry of Christ (vv. 37-38).**
* **(4) He speaks of Christ’s death (vv. 39-41).**
* cf. Deut 21:23
* **(5) He speaks of Christ’s resurrection (vv. 40-41).**

* **(6) He speaks on the apostolic commission given by Christ.**
* **(7) Finally, God intervenes in pouring out of the Spirit.**
* “…they were not prepared for this divine demonstration of the full and equal status of uncircumcised Gentiles in the church, despite Peter’s visions and his growing awareness of their significance. Later in Jerusalem, Peter acknowledges that the coming of the Spirit in this way signified the genuine belief of these Gentiles in the Lord Jesus and that God had granted to them ‘repentance that leads to life’ (11:17-18). ~ David Peterson, 340.

1. Peter’s Interpretation of the Firstfruits of the Gentile Mission (11:1-18)

* 11:1-18 ~ a problem, an explanation, and a reconciliation
* **(1) Gentile salvation was foretold in OT promises and prophecies.**
* **Gen 12:3** ~ And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.
* **Isa 9:2** ~ but later on He shall make it glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. 2 ﻿The people who walk in darkness Will see a great light; Those who live in a dark land, The light will shine on them.
* **Isa 49:6** ~ 6 He says, “It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations So that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”
* **Isa 56:6-7** ~ 6 ﻿“Also the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, To minister to Him, and to love the name of the Lord, To be His servants, every one who keeps from profaning the Sabbath And holds fast My covenant; 7 Even those I will bring to My holy mountain And make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar; For My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples.”
* **(2) Gentile salvation was also seen in several OT conversions.**
* Rahab (Josh 6:25)
* Ruth (1:16)
* Queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10:9)
* Namaan (2 Kings 5:15)
* Ninevah’s repentance (Jonah 3:8)
* **Gentiles need not become Jewish in order to be forgiven of their sins by Christ and filled with the Spirit. They only need to repent from their sins and believe in Christ.**
* [**Romans 3:29**](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Rom%203.29) **~** "Is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also. Seeing it is one God who shall justify the circumcision by faith, and the uncircumcision through faith."

1. Application

* **God is always actively working behind-the-scenes to further the gospel throughout the whole world (Col 1:6).**
* **Only the Gospel transcends ethnic and cultural barriers, even the most deeply entrenched, hostile ones (Gal 2:14ff; Eph 2:11-22).**
* **Gal 3:26-29** ~ 26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to promise.

1. On the Precipice of the Full Gentile Mission (11:19-30)

* The scene then shifts in 11:19 to the persecution associated w/ Stephen in Acts 8:1.
* We’re informed that some of these scattered Jewish believers made their way NW into Phoenicia, the island of Cyprus, and Syrian Antioch.
* Now these cities all had decent Jewish populations. And so the 1st group of people, v. 19, shared the gospel “to no one except the Jews alone.”
* But they were predominantly Gentile regions, with diverse populations, cultures, and religions.
* So, in v. 20, Luke informs us that some Jewish believers, most likely those from Cyprus (off Greece)) and Cyrene (Libya), went back to these areas, speaking to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus.
* And b/c the “hand of the Lord was with *them*,” a large number who believed turned to the Lord (v. 21).
* Note that these are again, as in Acts 8, unnamed laypeople who spread the gospel into these more culturally diverse lands.
* They were not authorized by Jerusalem to go out. They took it upon themselves to speak the word, the gospel to their neighbors.
* Granted, this was a unique period in church history, but we can’t help but realize that God doesn’t build His church through “regular believers.”
* When the news of Syrian Antioch turning to Christ reaches Jerusalem, they send Barnabas to confirm the work.
* Antioch itself was a hub of idol-worship, immorality, and trade, being on a river that led straight into the Mediterranean about 15 miles away. [more about Antioch next wk.]
* He goes and is blessed b/c he witnesses “the grace of God” ~ so he encourages the church in Antioch to ~ “with resolute heart to remain *true* to the Lord” (v. 23).
* And b/c of his ministry, “considerable numbers were brought to the Lord” (v. 24)
* Insight into his character in v. 24 ~ which is only given for Stephen and Philip ~ interesting how NT doesn’t highlight from a 3rd party mouth the character of any of the apostles!
* The sheer weight of the work causes him to look for help, and he goes to nearby Tarsus to look for the man whom Christ had called to preach before Gentiles ~ Saul.
* Instead of waiting for Saul to come, he takes the initiative to go. Nothing wrong w/ that. He saw a need, he remembered Saul’s commission, and he took action.
* Note the humility in Barnabas. He has no problem bringing in Saul, doesn’t try to do it all alone, doesn’t mind being eclipsed by someone else. He is all about Christ.
* So, when Saul comes down to Antioch, they spend a year meeting with and teaching “considerable numbers” of people.
* And this is where believers were first called “Christians” (v. 26)
* Most likely the testimony to Jesus as the Christ was so strong in this church that outsiders were *compelled* to give them this name, distinguishing them from the Jews.
* It’s also noteworthy that our identity as Christians (which is used only 3x in the NT ~ here, Acts 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16 ~ which are all contexts of persecution by the way) is created here in Antioch b/c this church become the hub for the Gentile Mission. And this church is the first truly non-Jew dominant church ~ like most churches in church history.
* VV. 27-30 then show us that the newly formed Gentile-dominant church loving their Jewish brethren in Judea to the south.
* When the prophet Agabus comes from Jerusalem, he prophesies to the Antiochene believers that a major famine would take place.
* Luke tells us that this happened during the reign of Claudius.
* Claudius reigned as Emperor of Rome from AD 41 to 54. Historical records reveal that famine hit in the 1st, 2nd, 4th, 9th, and 11th years of Claudius’ 14-yr. reign.
* Jewish historian Josephus notes a famine that struck Judea from 44-48, so this prediction probably occurred somewhere between 39-42.
* Note how in v. 29, these Gentile believers out of their own free will set aside what they could to contribute aid.
* V. 30 ~ And they send the aid w/ Barnabas and Saul to the elders in Jerusalem, 310 miles south.
* This is the same Jerusalem visit, Paul’s second, found in Gal 2:1-10.

1. God’s Assurance for the Gentile Mission (12:1-25)

* We close in ch. 12 with another persecution. But persecution always goes hand in hand w/ God’s assurance that the work of the Word shall go on.

1. God’s Assurance in Peter’s Deliverance

* Herod the king in v. 1 refers to Herod Agrippa I, grandson of Herod the Great who reigned when Jesus was born.
* Luke using “Herod” and not “Aggripa” associates him w/ his grandfather who tried to have Jesus killed and with his relative “Herod the Tetrach of Galilee” who had John the Baptist beheaded.
* By calling him “king” we know this is historically accurate b/c that was the title Caligula gave him. He couldn’t just call himself that in the Roman Empire.
* He was highly regarded by the Jews b/c he was very chummy w/ them, esp. the Pharisees, historical records tell us.
* And he had to be, b/c he was a puppet of the colonial Romans *and* he was from Edomite ancestry ~ so he had 2 strikes against him.
* But he was also very chummy with Claudius, who was a classmate of his.
* So he had the Jewish leadership and Rome on his side.
* And his tight relationship w/ the Jews and his desire to keep peace in Palestine, which would have made Rome happy, may be why he “laid hands on some who belonged to the church in order to mistreat them.” (v. 1)
* This description is one of serious violence.
* V. 2 ~ The apostle James, not Jesus’ half-brother, is beheaded. Fulfilling Christ’s words in **Mk 10:39**, that James would drink the cup that Jesus would drink.
* Because this pleases the Jews, he arrests Peter “during the Days of Unleavened Bread,” and he holds him in prison until *after* Passover to execute him then b/c the Jews would be offended if he did this during a holy time like Passover.
* Ironic that our Lord was executed the same time.
* Now what is the church doing while Peter is being guarded?
* They are “fervently” praying for him. (*ektenos*)
* This has always been the church’s response in Acts. We saw this when Peter and John were 1st arrested in Acts 4.
* The church was known for devoting themselves to prayer.
* Then we see that through their prayers God delivers Peter, yet again!, from prison.
* This is the 2nd of three divine rescues of believers from prison in Acts (Acts 5:18-20; 16:23-39).
* You’ll note the Exodus-related language of “Unleavened Bread” and “Passover” to Peter’s deliverance here.
* And you’ll note the divine initiative and the human passivity in all of this.
  + V. 9 ~ indicates that Peter was just “out of it” the whole time, not knowing if this were real or not.
* When he’s finally out of harm’s way, the angel who rescues him and leads him out, departs (vv. 10-11), and he finally understands what happened.
* Then he goes to John Mark’s mother’s home, where the believers were gathered together “praying” (v. 12).
* But when he knocks on the door, Rhoda, the servant-girl, recognizes it’s Peter, and overwhelmed by joy, she doesn’t open the gate but goes inside to let everyone know!
* But they all think she’s “seeing things,” seeing his angel.
* Meanwhile, Peter is continuously knocking (v. 16)!
* So they go out and open the door to see Peter, he has to motion them to be silent b/c they are stunned.
* We’re reminded that God is able to far more abundantly that all that we can ask or think (Eph 3:20).
* Now Peter leaves, we don’t know where, and his escape causes “no small disturbance” w/ Herod, who ends up executing the guards who were responsible for Peter.

1. God’s Assurance in Herod’s Death

* Now the scene shifts to Herod, who represents political tyranny that tries to snuff out the church.
* Herod is political power and authority going up against God’s authority.
* Luke shows us that no amount of worldly political power could challenge God’s power and plan. He would prevail.
* Herod is very angry w/ Tyre and Sidon, on the coast, NW of Jerusalem. Gentile regions.
* There seems to have been some sort of trade dispute so that food coming out of Herod’s territories was not getting to them.
* So they appealed to Blastus, his chamberlain, his chief of staff, to appeal on their behalf.
* So in Caesarea this is about to happen. And he’s there for another reason, probably for a celebration of the Roman emperor.
* And as he begins delivering an address the people, they “kept crying out, ‘The voice of a god and not of a man!’
* What happens?
* **Acts 12:23** ~ 23 And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and died.
* Compare Peter’s response to Cornelius when he falls to his feet and worships Peter or the angels response when John falls to the angel’s feet in Rev (cf. [Rev. 19:10; 22:8–9](https://www.esv.org/Revelation+19%3A10%3B+Revelation+22%3A8-9/)).
* B/c he didn’t give glory to God, God “struck” him, which is the same word used for the angel “striking” Peter in v. 7.
* Gospel leads to churches that grow by teaching in a community of discipleship and love.

Teaching is an essential aspect of church life and evangelism: (2:14-36; 3:12-26; 13:16-41)

Maturity of church: (14:21-22; 18:11, 24-28; 19:8-10; 20:17-35)