

Week 19

The Birth of the Gentile Church

Peter Defends His Ministry to the Gentiles

Chapter 11 finds Peter on trial of sorts. What he was accused of was quite grave. No good Jew would enter the home of a gentile. And even if one, for some compelling reason, felt he had to go into a gentile home, he certainly would never sit and eat with one. In the ancient world it was considered an act of intimate friendship to sit and eat with another.

The Jews never envisioned that gentiles would ever be saved or as partakers of God's mercy. It stands to reason that the Jewish Christians, as all the Apostles and first believers were, wouldn't think of God saving the gentiles either.

However, Luke gives us the story of Cornelius and Peter not just once, but twice because of its ultimate importance. This story was about way more than just Jews now being able to eat that which was previously forbidden in the law of Moses. This story is about the fullness of God's love and redemption being extended to every soul in the world. If God deigned to save the gentiles, then there was truly no one who was outside of His love and the possibility of redemption.

When Peter is called to account for his actions, he doesn't really defend himself. He recounts the facts of the story in full detail. Peter knew that the facts were so amazing, they couldn't be disputed. In hearing the story, it was as if God Himself were making the decision to bring the gentiles in to full communion with the church through baptism, having given them the same gift of His Holy Spirit. Peter knew it wasn't his decision, it was the will of God.

As the story of Cornelius and Peter spread across the nations, some of the disciples who were dispersed during the persecution after Stephen's death, made their way to Antioch, the third greatest city in the world behind Rome and Alexandria. Luke gives us the story of the gospel coming to Antioch immediately after the story of Cornelius to show how significant the it was that the gospel and the Spirit were given to the gentiles.

Antioch could perhaps best be described as the Las Vegas of the Mediterranean world. Gambling and immorality were the course of everyday life. The city was the home to the Goddess Daphne. Daphne was a mortal who was said to be the love of the god Apollo. The myth goes that as Apollo pursued Daphne, she ran from him and to save her he turned her into a Laurel bush. The Temple in her honor was filled with Priestesses who were prostitutes and the worship of her was exceedingly immoral.

Antioch was the perfect place for the gentile world to receive the gospel. If the gospel could flourish there, it could flourish anywhere. The news of gentile conversions in Antioch soon made its way to Jerusalem, where the mother church decided to send Barnabas to see if it was for real.

Barnabas was a man of great faith and holiness. When he found the movement genuine, he not only embraced it, he went to get Saul/Paul to join him. Together they stayed for a year to help build the new church.

It was in Antioch, Luke notes that Jesus followers were first called, “Christians.” In Greek, Christian is “Christianos”. The ‘anos’ at the end of a word meant, ‘to be a part of’. The name Christian was given as a derogatory nickname for sure by the people of Antioch. However, Luke mentions this fact because by the time of his writing, the name had been embraced by the disciples as a badge of honor – they were, in reality, a part of Jesus Christ.

B. THE CONVERSION OF SAUL (9:1-30). KEY PERSON # 3

- 1. Saul’s Vision of Jesus (9:1-9)**
- 2. Ananias Ministers to Saul (9:10-19a)**
- 3. Paul Proclaims Jesus as the Christ (9:19b-30)**

C. THE STATE OF THE CHURCH (9:31)

D. THE MINISTRY OF PETER (9:32-11:18)

- 1. Peter in Lydda: Aeneas is healed (9:32-35)**
- 2. Peter in Joppa: Tabitha is raised from the dead (9:36-43)**
- 3. Cornelius' Vision (10:1-8)**
- 4. Peter's Vision (10:9-16)**
- 5. Peter Goes with the Men from Cornelius (10:17-22)**
- 6. The Gentiles Receive the Holy Spirit (10:23-48)**
- 7. Peter Defends Himself Before the Jerusalem Church (11:1-18)**
- 8. The church is born in Antioch (11:19-26)**

