

~ACTS~

Lesson 35- Astounding News: Salvation to the Gentiles (pt5) Acts 11:1-18

Last week we finished chapter 10 and we saw the Salvation of God fall upon the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius. And not only were these Gentiles born again as they heard the Word of God, but they were also filled with the Holy Spirit and the gift of tongues was manifested to them. This was all by God's doing. God chose to empower these Gentiles with His Spirit, in the same manner as He did the Jews on Pentecost, as undeniable proof that the Gentiles were being baptized into the same body by the same Spirit unto Eternal Life, 1 Cor 12:13. Today we will be looking at the first 18 verses in chapter 11 and seeing the shocking effect this had on the Jews as news of this spread throughout Judea and makes its way to Jerusalem.

You remember, up till this point, Peter had been away from Jerusalem for a couple of years because in Acts 9, Peter had left on a missionary journey to edify the body of Christ and visit all the churches in the Israeli region. This was a trip specifically to build up and edify the Church after the intense persecution from Saul of Tarsus had scattered the churches throughout the region. So he visited the churches in Galilee, Samaria, and Judea, Acts 9:31-32, and then God led Peter to Joppa where the Holy Spirit, working through Peter, raised Tabitha from the dead which then led to Peter staying in Joppa at Simon the tanner's house for "many days," which I conjecture was a couple of years. And in this time, God began preparing Peter's heart for the events of the Gentiles in Acts 10. You can see God working on Peter even back in chapter 2 when the Holy Spirit first came on Pentecost and Hellenistic Jews were being brought into the body of Christ. Then in chapter 8 Peter traveled to Samaria, and then in chapter 9 he spends 2 years in the unclean house of Simon the tanner, setting him up for the vision that He would give him that would break down the barrier between Jew and Gentile. And notice Peter has been God's faithful common witness in every one of these barriers coming down. So now, after the Gentile's conversion, Peter is asked to stay a few days in this Gentile house, which a week ago would have been absurd to Peter, but now God has shown him that all men are clean. This now brings us into chapter 11.

News of the Gentile's Salvation has spread to the Jews in Judea and Jerusalem. So, how do you think this news is being accepted?... Are they throwing a party and rejoicing over these Gentile converts? Not at all..., in fact they start yelling at Peter and begin rebuking him for doing this. So today we will be looking at Acts 11:1-18 and seeing the major contention that has developed because of the Gentile's Salvation. So let's start with the first three verses...

11:1-3) ¹ Now the apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the Word of God. ² And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him, ³ saying, "You went into uncircumcised men and ate with them!"

News of the Gentile's conversion spread throughout Judea. My guess is that while Peter stayed with Cornelius for a few days, ἡμέρας τινάς, (this could have been up to a few weeks, Acts 9:19; 16:12; 24:24) the other six men traveled back to Jerusalem, telling everyone along the way about this amazing news. But news of this was not accepted well and contention began to grow. This is why it was so important that Peter was the main witness to this event, because otherwise I don't think Jerusalem would have accepted it. You can already see some dissension starting to take place. So when Peter returns to Jerusalem, they begin contending with him. Talk about a welcome home party! Peter had been gone for a couple of years and yet the first thing they do when he gets back is attack him for eating with Gentiles.

Notice Luke describes these men contending with Peter as... **those of the circumcision**. I don't think these were any of the Apostles. It seems the Apostles were in other parts of Judea evangelizing. However, it is very possible that James, the Lord's brother was there because he became the head of the Jerusalem church. And in Galatians, Paul describes "those of the circumcision" as "men from James." Gal 2:12. But

we do know that these men were believing Jews, Acts 11:15, but they were so engrained in their Legalistic traditions that they didn't want to accept this amazing news that Salvation had come to uncircumcised Gentiles.

These men of the circumcision party were probably converted Pharisees, Acts 15:5, and also remember back in Acts 6:7 Luke says "*a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.*" These men contending with Peter were the ones steeped in religious traditions and still bound under the works of the Law even though they believed in Jesus. But they still thought that the only way a Gentile could become a Christian was if they became a proselyte and converted to Judaism and followed the Jewish ways of circumcision and the Law of Moses. God was breaking these barriers down, but it would take some time.

This new revelation was first given to Paul, but he was chased out of Jerusalem and had to go north to Tarsus, Acts 9:30. Then God gave Peter this revelation, but he hadn't been back to Jerusalem to enlighten them yet. So these Jews of the circumcision party are still steeped in Legalism and the tradition of men, and when Peter gets back to Jerusalem they attack him. It says in verse 2, *those of the circumcision contended with him...* This word "contended" is διακρίνω. It means to thoroughly judge in making a distinction. They were condemning Peter for not following their Jewish traditions. In the early church there was huge pressure for Christians to conform to the traditions of Judaism and you can see it here in the text. Even though these were believing Jews, they were still bound in Legalism. By the end of the text in verse 18, it seems as though they accepted this fact, as did the six from Joppa, but there were many still who did not accept this. We see this even nine years later when they are still having this debate and the Apostles have to meet and resolve this contention at the Jerusalem Council meeting, Acts 15:1-2, 5-7. And then even after this, there were still "those of the circumcision... men from James" Paul says, who were trying to pressure Christians into following the Law, Galatians 2:11-14. And notice in verse 14, Paul calls these people Judaizers, ἰουδαϊζῶν- those who compel Gentiles to live as a Jew according to the Law. Paul rebukes them of their heresies and warns the Christians not to fall into their trap, Gal 1:7; 2:4-5, 12-14; 4:17; 5:10-12; 6:12-13; Titus 1:10. This is what the book of Galatians and Hebrews is primarily about. And this continued even into the 2nd century as we see Ignatius write about this in his letter to the Magnesians. Ignatius was a faithful bishop, πρεσβύτερος, of Antioch (we'll be talking a lot about Antioch next week because Antioch becomes a major hub in Christianity) Ignatius was martyred in the Roman arena by wild beasts around 108AD. He was contemporary with Polycarp and probably knew the Apostle John personally. And in his letter to the Magnesians, he warns them of the Judaizers trying trap them in the bondage of the works of the Law unto Salvation.

Ignatius of Antioch: Epistle to the Magnesians

¹⁰ It is monstrous to talk of Jesus Christ and to practice Judaism. For Christianity did not believe in Judaism, but Judaism in Christianity, wherein every tongue believed and was gathered together unto God. " Now these things I say, my dearly beloved, not because I have learned that any of you are so minded; but as being less than any of you, I would have you be on your guard early, that you fall not into the snares of vain doctrine; but be fully persuaded concerning the birth and the passion and the resurrection, which took place in the time of the governorship of Pontius Pilate; for these things were truly and certainly done by Jesus Christ our hope; from which hope may it not befall any of you to be turned aside.

This was the heresy of the Judaizers, but even with these warnings, men still to this day continue to pressure Christians to follow the traditions of men unto Salvation. That's what any works-based religion teaches. They might confess Jesus as Lord, but they are bound by the traditions of men. And this is very dangerous because this is saying that the blood of Jesus wasn't enough. That you have to add your own good works to the blood of Jesus. Paul says in Hebrews that this person... "*has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace.*" Hebrews 10:29. This is trying to add our good works to God's grace so we can be saved. Paul

admonishes the Galatians saying in Galatians 4:9-11-*“⁹ But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? ¹⁰ You observe days and months and seasons and years. ¹¹ I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain.”* And in Galatians 5:4- *“You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.”*

In the early church there was huge pressure from these “Judaizers” against Gentile Christians to be circumcised and follow the Law of Moses to be saved. And now, even today we can have the same pressures. We don’t have any pressure to become a Jew, but the pressure of church tradition is all around us. The enemy has been infiltrating into Christianity for 2,000 years trying to keep the Church bound by Legalistic traditions to earn your Salvation. But instead we do what Paul says in Galatians 5:1, 5-6-*“¹ Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. ⁵ For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. ⁶ For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.”* This is what we have been learning in Acts chapter 10, that Salvation is only by grace through faith in Jesus Christ apart from any kind of meritorious works.

So here in Acts 11, Peter is confronted by “those of the circumcision,” and Peter has a decision to how he is going to respond... he can either retaliate in anger, he can throw his weight around as an Apostle, as one who followed Jesus for three years, or he can respond in loving Truth. As we will see Peter makes the right choice being led of the Spirit he recounts his vision to these Jews, and begins proving to them that this was the work of God.

And in these next 14 verses, Acts 11:4-17, you’ll notice that Peter’s response isn’t anything more than just speaking the facts and showing them that this was God’s doing. In fact, when I read this, I get the impression that Peter’s tone is one of amazement as well saying, “I was just as shocked as you guys are! But God has made is clear to me that this is His will.”

This is so important that the Holy Spirit takes the time to describe this event in detail again. He could have summarized this account, but instead, Luke, through the Spirit takes the time to tell the story again. And I think He does this to show us how vitally important it is for these barriers of Legalistic tradition to be removed in our life so that the Gospel can be preached to the world without partiality.

So Peter begins telling them the facts in order from the beginning. We spent four weeks on chapter 10 really dissecting all these things Peter is saying, so we’ll just lightly touch on some details as we read this, **Acts 11:4-10**. Notice that Peter is making this personal; he received the vision from heaven, this great sheet came to him, and the voice from heaven spoke directly to him. Peter is making this very clear to the Jews that this was a vision from God to him personally. And notice how he even throws in the fact that he refuted God and said no to him. “Not so Lord...” The facts are telling the story and these Jews of the circumcision are seeing that this isn’t Peter making this up. This is a commandment from God. And remember, Peter was so stubborn that God had to say this three times.

Let me just comment on these “three times” because I think it is significant when you start to think about the times in Peter’s life that God had to repeat Himself three times to Peter. In Gethsemane, Jesus woke up Peter, James, and John three times after He had told them to stay awake and pray with Him, Matthew 26:36-46; Peter denied Jesus three times. And it says in Matthew 26:75- *And Peter remembered the word of Jesus who had said to him, “Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.” So he went out and wept bitterly.* And again after Jesus rose from the dead on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus asks Peter three times, *“Do you love Me?”* John 21:15-17. So I think when Peter heard God repeat Himself three times in the vision, it probably sparked this memory that he needs to obey God when He speaks. Now speaking of “three,” notice verse 11...

11-12) At that very moment, **three men** stood before the house where I was, having been sent to me from Caesarea. ¹² Then the Spirit told me to go with them, doubting nothing. Moreover, these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered the man's house.

Two things I want to point out. Notice the Spirit tells Peter to “doubt nothing.” This is the word, διακρίνω. We saw this same word in verse 2 when Luke says the Jews were “contending” with Peter. That word contending is the same word διακρίνω, but translated here as doubting nothing. The Holy Spirit isn't saying don't doubt, but rather don't judge people in making a distinction. Don't judge someone based on their outward appearance. Which is exactly what these Jews are doing to Peter. They are διεκρίνοντο, judging Peter and making a distinction with him because he ate and kept company with the Gentiles. So God tells Peter, don't do that.

The second thing to mention is notice how many witnesses Peter takes with him to Joppa... six. And notice these six men are with Peter in Jerusalem, because he says **these six brethren accompanied me**. He's probably pointing to them saying we were all witnesses to this. And including himself that would be seven witnesses, which as we know seven is the number of completion. So I don't think it was a coincidence to have seven witnesses for this milestone event. And as I said earlier, I think it was these six that started telling the Jews what happened in Caesarea, but they didn't believe them. Then Peter continues in verses 13-14 telling them about Cornelius' vision as well...

13-14) And he told us how he had seen an angel standing in his house, who said to him, ‘Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter, ¹⁴ who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved.’

Peter is stating the facts. He says not only did God talk to me, but He also spoke to this Gentile through an angel, and the angel told him to send for me. And that I would come to him and speak words of Salvation to him and his whole household. So you can just picture Peter telling them saying, “This wasn't my idea, this is all God.”

15) And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning.

Peter says, “Just as the Holy Spirit fell upon us at Pentecost, the same thing happened with these Gentiles.” And Peter continues in verse 16...

16) Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, ‘John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’

Peter has been stating factual proofs that this is the work of God, He showed me a vision, He showed Cornelius a vision by sending an angel, the Spirit spoke directly to me, the Holy Spirit fell upon the Gentiles in the same manner as He did with us, and on top of all that, this is what the Lord Jesus said would happen when He said, **you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit**. Then notice his final rebuttal in verse 17...

17) If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?”

So, Peter says, “This is God's deal. If He wants to bring Salvation to the Gentiles in this manner, who was I to try and stop Him?” And you can picture Peter saying, “Believe me I tried. I even told God ‘NO,’ and He had to repeat Himself three times,” Acts 10:14-16. “But now I am perceiving and gaining this deep understanding that God shows no partiality, and neither should we.”

So after Peter lays out the facts, being led of the Spirit, notice their response in verse 18...

18) When they heard these things, they became silent; They didn't know what to say, so they stopped their διακρίνω, their judging Peter, and instead accepted his words...**and they glorified God, saying, "Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life."** As shocking as it may be to these Jews, they are learning that God has given the same promise of Eternal Life to all who would believe, Jew and Gentile alike.

So what does it mean that **God granted them repentance to Life**? Does that mean that God is granting the ability to repent to some and not others? Is God sovereignly choosing who can repent and who can't?

Absolutely not! Repentance is an act of free will. It is a μετάνοια, a change of mind. A change of heart to turn away from sin, ἀποστρέφω, and turn upon, ἐπιστρέφω, Jesus Christ unto Everlasting Life, Acts 3:19, 26. God is not granting the ability to repent... but rather, God is granting the result of repentance which leads to Eternal Life... That is His gift. And He grants this repentance unto life to those, who of their free will, turn away from their sin and turn upon Jesus. God grants repentance unto Life to all who seek Him and believe in Him. We receive the gift of life; we receive the forgiveness of sins through Jesus; we receive the gift of repentance leading unto Eternal Life when we believe in Jesus Christ and His redemptive work on the cross, Acts 26:18-20; 20:21.

And these Jews who are listening to Peter are receiving this same revelation that God shows no partiality, and He grants eternal life to all who believe, Jew and Gentile alike. But even more, Peter is gaining a revelation that goes even deeper than that because it's not even that Gentiles can become saved just like the Jews, but that the Jews can be saved just like the Gentiles, Acts 15:11. Completely by grace through faith apart from the works of the Law. No need for circumcision or the traditions of men... but only through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.