

Chapter 10

Taking the Gospel to the Gentiles

One of the strongest cultural barriers existed between the Jews and the Gentiles. It was a process to tear down this barrier. Peter welcomed the Samaritans as brothers in Christ. He stayed at the home of a tanner. But accepting the Gentiles as equals before the Lord was a huge thing. Strict Jews would not be guests in a Gentile home (see verse 28) nor invite Gentiles into their homes. Dirt from a Gentile country was considered defiled and a Jew would shake it off his sandals before entering Israel (Matthew 10:14; Mark 6:11; Luke 9:5; Acts 13:51). Jews would not eat food prepared by Gentile hands. Gentiles were considered unclean and their presence defiling. But in Ephesians 2:11-22, Paul wrote that through Christ's death, He *made both groups into one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall*.

As sovereign preparation, both the convert, Cornelius, and the preacher, Peter, received visions from God, preparing them for what was to follow.

Verse 1—*Now there was a man at Caesarea*—a harbor city on the Mediterranean coast, about 30 miles north of Joppa (Tel Aviv). It was the capital of the Roman province of Judea and the residence of its procurator.

- **named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian cohort**—A full Roman legion was 6,000 men, divided into ten cohorts of 600 men each. A centurion commanded 100 of these men. Each legion, therefore, had 60 centurions. The Roman historian Polybius described centurions as “not so much venturesome daredevils as natural leaders of a steady and sedate spirit, not so much men who will initiate attacks and open the battle as men who will hold their ground when worsted and hard pressed and be ready to die at their posts” [*Histories* vi. xix-xlii].

Verse 2—*a devout man*—usually indicates a follower of the Mosaic Law

- **one who feared God**—He had abandoned his pagan religion and worshipped the God described in Judaism
- **with all his household**—He influenced his own household to also worship God
- **gave many alms to the Jewish people**—James 2:17 says, *...faith, if it has no works, is dead*. Cornelius demonstrated his faith in good works.

APPLICATION—When it comes to salvation, it's faith with no works. But after salvation, works count for eternal rewards (1 Corinthians 3:11-14; 2 Corinthians 5:10).

- **prayed to God continually**—His appeal to God

Verse 3—*About the ninth hour of the day*—3:00 P.M. The time of prayer in the Jewish day (Acts 3:1).

- **he clearly** [shining, unclouded] **saw in a vision** [not a dream in the night] **an angel of God who had just come in and said to him, “Cornelius!”**—

Verse 4—*And fixing his gaze on him and being much alarmed*—Angels in the Bible often produced terror in people (Judges 6:22; 13:20; Daniel 10:4-9).

- **he said, “What is it, Lord?” And he said to him, “Your prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial** [made mention] **before God**—

APPLICATION—Cornelius was a devout man, worshipping the true God to the best of his knowledge, but that was not enough to save him. He needed to know about Jesus.

Verses 5-6—*“Now dispatch some men to Joppa and send for a man named Simon, who is also called Peter, he is staying with a tanner named Simon, whose house is by the sea”*—

Verse 7—*When the angel who was speaking to him had left, he summoned two of his servants*

- *and a devout* [usually denoting someone obedient to the Mosaic Law] *soldier of those who were his personal attendants*—

APPLICATION—Not only were Cornelius’ household worshippers of God, but evidently this soldier who was his personal attendant was also a worshipper. His words, his life, his faith, his helping others, all had an impact on those around him and closest to him.

Verse 8—*and after he had explained everything to them, he sent them to Joppa*—

APPLICATION—Why didn’t the angel just tell Cornelius the Gospel? Here’s three ideas: (1) During this age, God has chosen to use humans to spread the Gospel (Romans 10). (2) God wanted Peter to observe firsthand Cornelius’ salvation. Only then would he welcome the Gentiles into the church, as he did with the Samaritans (Acts 8). (3) Hearing the Gospel from Peter would immediately put him into the growing network of believers in Judea (as Peter brought other believers with him—verse 23).

Verse 9—*On the next day, as they were on their way and approaching the city*—

- *Peter went up on the housetop*—A flat patio on the housetop, common to houses there, even today
- *about the sixth hour to pray*—noon

APPLICATION—God is about to prepare Peter for a monumental shift in his thinking. God not only sovereignly called Cornelius to salvation, He also prepared Peter as the means, humanly speaking, to accomplish that.

Verse 10—*But he became hungry and was desiring to eat; but while they were making preparations, he fell into a trance*—Since he was hungry, Peter’s vision involved eating.

Verses 11-12—*and he saw the sky opened up, and an object like a great sheet coming down, lowered by four corners to the ground, and there were in it all kinds of four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the air*—These were both clean and unclean animals according to the dietary laws for Israel (Leviticus 11). Leviticus 20:25-26 reads, *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. Thus you are to be holy to Me, for I the Lord am holy, and I have set you apart from the peoples to be Mine.*

APPLICATION—The dietary restrictions were strictly for Israel, under the Mosaic Law. There is nothing intrinsically good or bad about these animals. For example, before the Mosaic Law, even Jewish people living in Egypt were free to eat of these animals. And now in the church age, we are again free to eat of these animals. They were clean and unclean simply because God declared them to be so, as He here declares them to now be clean. It was a physical way of separating God’s people from the non-Jewish people in the land.

Verse 13—*A voice came to him, “Get up, Peter, kill and eat!”*—Peter was horrified. And he protested—as was his personality (Matthew 26:34-35).

Verse 14—*But Peter said, “By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean”*—His keeping the “kosher” laws showed his commitment to pleasing God. How could he immediately throw all that aside without betraying his conscience?

Verse 15—*Again a voice came to him a second time, “What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy”*—A pig is not unclean because it is unclean. Between the Flood and the Mosaic Law, men were able to eat pork. Even the Jews after Abraham and during the Egyptian Bondage ate pork. It was not until the Mosaic Law that God declared that pork was unclean. Here, God is declaring it is now clean.

Verse 16—*This happened three times, and immediately the object was taken up into the sky*—Reminds us that Peter denied Jesus three times.

Verse 17—*Now while Peter was greatly perplexed in mind*—He was thrown off balance, stumped

APPLICATION—Jesus had already outright told Peter to take the Gospel to the nations (Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8), but Peter did not wrestle with this to discern what that actually meant. So now Jesus used an object lesson and Peter had to think and ponder what it meant and connect it to the clear teaching already in his mind. This was sort of an application of that.

as to what the vision which he had seen might be—There are two meanings to this vision:

- It was a sign that the Old Testament dietary restrictions were being done away with (Mark 7:14-23; Romans 14:1-3; Colossians 2:16-17; 1 Timothy 4:1-5). That separation which resulted from the dietary restrictions of the Law was now counterproductive to God bringing together the Jews and Gentiles in the body of Christ.
- It was a picture of the church, which included both Jews (clean animals) and Gentiles (unclean animals) in one sheet, in one body of Christ.

behold, the men who had been sent by Cornelius, having asked directions for Simon’s house, appeared at the gate—“Peter was about to get understanding as to the meaning of his vision. Not only did God sovereignly prepare Cornelius and Peter, He sovereignly determined and arranged the timing of bringing them together” [MacArthur, *Acts*].

Verse 18—*and calling out, they were asking whether Simon, who was also called Peter, was staying there*—

Verses 19-20—*While Peter was reflecting on the vision*—It’s interesting that God didn’t just tell Peter to go to the Gentile Cornelius with the Gospel or tell him what the vision meant. We are also to reflect and meditate on the Word of God to learn its meaning. Joshua wrote, “*This book of the law...you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it...*” (Joshua 1:8). David wrote, “*My eyes anticipate the night watches, that I may meditate on Your Word*” (Psalm 119:148). Paul wrote, “*...be transformed by the renewing of your mind*” (Romans 12:2). Peter wrote, “*like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the Word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation*” (1 Peter 2:2).

APPLICATION—As far as we know from the Bible, once the Scriptures were written, God no longer is speaking through visions in our age. *God spoke long ago...in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son...* (Hebrews 1:1-2).

- *the Spirit said to him*—This shows that the Holy Spirit is a person who speaks, not a force. And He is involved in carrying out God’s plans.

- **“Behold, three men are looking for you. But get up, go downstairs and accompany them without misgiving** [apprehension or wondering about the outcome]
- **for I have sent them Myself”**—

Verse 21—Peter went down to the men and said, “Behold, I am the one you are looking for; what is the reason for which you have come?”—Peter is still trying to figure out the animals in the sheet and how these men fit together with that vision. But he obeyed the Holy Spirit.

Verse 22—They said, “Cornelius, a centurion, a righteous and God-fearing man well spoken of by the entire nation of the Jews, was divinely directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and hear a message from you”—

Verse 23—So he invited them in and gave them lodging—It was too late to walk the 25 miles back to Caesarea that day. So Peter does a shocking thing. Peter was staying with Simon the tanner (an unclean occupation), and now he invites these Gentiles (from the occupying Roman army, no less) in and gave them lodging (again, an unclean thing to do according to the Mosaic Law—see verse 28).

APPLICATION—Peter evidently had a problem giving up the dietary laws but his prejudice against the Gentile people was already being removed. Compassion for people distinguished Jesus’ ministry from what the Pharisees’ did—who were known for their laws, not their compassion. Jesus said, *“I desire compassion, and not sacrifice...”* (Matthew 9:13). Jesus said compassion was more important than religious sacrifice.

- **And on the next day he got up and went away with them**—as the Holy Spirit had commanded him to do.
- **and some of the brethren from Joppa accompanied him**—Although not commanded to do so, Peter took 6 believers from Joppa with him (Acts 11:12).

APPLICATION—You don’t go through the Christian life alone. Not only is our life lived out before unbelievers and to be used to share the Gospel, but it is also lived out before other believers—all to the glory of God (2 Corinthians 1:3-7). So share with others, take other believers along with you, so they can learn through what is happening to you, and go with others so you can learn through what is happening to them. Even if they don’t go physically, they can go via your phone calls, e-mails, writing, pictures...

Verse 24—On the following day he entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them and had called together his relatives and close friends—Eager to hear what the angel said Peter would say

Verses 25-26—When Peter entered, Cornelius met him, and fell at his feet and worshiped him. But Peter raised him up, saying, “Stand up; I too am just a man”—Probably overwhelmed and connecting Peter with the supernatural appearance of the angel who had appeared to him. In Acts 14:11-15, a similar thing happened to Paul and Barnabas.

APPLICATION—When John ... *fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed me these things. But he said to me, “Do not do that. I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book. Worship God”* (Revelation 22:8-9). Here the angel puts himself on the level of believers, neither of which are to be worshipped. You only worship God. (And prayer is a form of worship—it is petitioning a higher authority. So you should not pray to angels or dead saints either.)

Verse 27—As he talked with him, he entered and found many people assembled— This is important. If only Cornelius was converted, the believers in Jerusalem may have thought that was not typical or the norm. But if a whole group of Gentiles were saved, they would have to accept that God was including Gentiles into the church.

Verse 28—*And he said to them, “You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him*—This is how Peter had lived his life up to this point (see John 4:9; 18:28; Acts 11:2-3; 22:21-22; Galatians 2:12).

1. **yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean**—He now understood (in part) what God was trying to tell him with the sheet. It was okay for Peter to come into Cornelius’ home and talk to these Gentiles.

Verse 29—*“That is why I came without even raising any objection when I was sent for. So I ask for what reason you have sent for me”*—But Peter is still not sure why God wanted him to come to Cornelius’ home

Verses 30-33—*Cornelius said, “Four days ago to this hour, I was praying in my house during the ninth hour; and behold, a man stood before me in shining garments and he said, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. Therefore send to Joppa and invite Simon, who is also called Peter, to come to you; he is staying at the house of Simon the tanner by the sea.’ So I sent for you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come. Now then, we are all here present before God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord”*—As a commander himself, Cornelius understood that when God spoke, it was a command demanding obedience. Both Peter and Cornelius were ready to obey God’s command.

Verse 34—*Opening his mouth*—an expression indicating the speech that follows is important

2. **Peter said: “I most certainly understand now**—This is the moment when it dawns on him—he now grasps and makes sense of what God meant when He lowered the sheet with the clean and unclean animals. Peter is to present the Gospel to these Gentiles and they will be part of the church.
3. **that God is not one to show partiality**—to favor one over the other. God is *not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance* (2 Peter 3:9). It doesn’t matter whether the person is rich or poor, male or female, Jew or Gentile, tall or short, etc. (see Romans 2:11; 3:29-20; Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 6:9). This was also taught in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 10:17; 2 Chronicles 19:7; Job 34:19).

Verse 35—*but in every nation*—Even when God was dealing with the nation of Israel, there were people in other nations who came to God (Queen of Sheba, Rahab, Ruth, the Wise Men).

4. **the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him**—Some understand this verse to be saying that God accepts all who are sincere on the basis of their works. But that is obviously inconsistent with biblical teaching. “The meaning is not that such persons are thereby saved (cf. Acts 11:14) but rather that they are suitable candidates for salvation. Such preparation betokens a spiritual earnestness that will result in faith as the gospel is heard and received (Harrison, “Interpreting Acts: The Expanding Church,” p. 182). Cornelius responded to the work of God in his soul by fearing God and doing what is right, as he sought to know and obey God. Therefore, God brought the Gospel about Jesus to him, and when he heard the saving truth of the Gospel, he eagerly responded.

APPLICATION—This was initiated sovereignly by God in the elect Cornelius’ heart (Romans 9), and brought about by God through the proclamation by the human instrument of Peter (Romans 10), and accepted by the free will decision of Cornelius and his household (Acts 16:31).

Verse 36—*“The word which He sent to the sons of Israel*—The Jews were the first to receive the message of the Gospel (Acts 3:26), according to the plan (Acts 1:8).

1. **preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all)**—All people are fallen and are at war with God (Romans 5:10). The sacrificial death of Jesus ended that hostility by paying the price for sin (2 Corinthians 5:19 see also Colossians 1:20).

APPLICATION—Peter is not talking about peace between men on earth. He is talking about peace with God. That peace can come only through Jesus Christ.

Verse 37—you yourselves know—Caesarea being the seat of the Roman government at the time

2. **the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed**—which prepared the hearts of the people with a message of repentance and a longing for the reign of righteousness

Verse 38—You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him—In 1 John 3:8, John says, *The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil*. So there was no doubt that *God was with Him* in this work.

Verse 39—“We are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem—These Romans have heard about what Jesus did (verse 38) and now Peter said he was a witness of what Jesus did (verse 39). The land of the Jews would be the Galilee area in the north and Judea, the area around Jerusalem.

3. **They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross**—Religious men had put to death the One who went about doing good and destroying the works of the devil. How evil are they!!

Verse 40—“God raised Him up on the third day—Through the resurrection, God demonstrated to everyone that Jesus was come from God.

4. **and granted**—also translated as “gift,” i.e., Jesus raised from the dead for sure. But it was a gift from God that He granted that Jesus become visible to some witnesses.
5. **that He become visible**—The resurrection is crucial to Christianity. Paul wrote, *...if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins* (1 Corinthians 15:17).

Verse 41—not to all the people—The result when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead was that the Jewish leaders from that day planned to kill Jesus (John 11:48-53). His resurrection was for believers and His becoming visible was to believers—for those who were His own.

6. **but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God**—It was part of the truth of Jesus that they were witnesses of—from His baptism to His ascension (Acts 1:22).
7. **that is, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead**—This also proves a bodily resurrection because spirit beings were incapable of doing that (see Luke 23:43).

Verse 42—“And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed [determined] by God as Judge of the living and the dead—See John 5:21-29; Acts 17:30-31; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10; 2 Timothy 4:8; Revelation 19:11ff).

Verse 43—“Of Him all the prophets bear witness—Not only were the apostles witnesses of Jesus, so were the prophets (Isaiah in Isaiah 53:11, Jeremiah in Jeremiah 31:34, Zechariah in Zechariah 13:1).

8. **that through His name**—See John 14:6; Romans 10:13; 1 Corinthians 1:2; Ephesians 1:21; Philippians 2:9-10; 2 Thessalonians 1:12, James 2:7; 1 Peter 4:16; 1 John 3:23; 5:13).
9. **everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins**—This is the essence of the Gospel.
 - It’s available to *everyone* (Acts 2:39; 13:39; Romans 9:33; 10:11; 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9).

- *who believes in Him.* John 1:12 says, *But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name* (John 3:14-17; 6:69; Romans 10:11; Galatians 3:22; Ephesians 2:8-9).
- *receives forgiveness of sins*—Acts 2:38; 13:38-39; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14).

Verse 44—*While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message*—Obviously, when Cornelius and his friends heard the Gospel, they believed in Jesus. Immediately in response to their faith, they received the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 12:13). After the Samaritans believed, they had to wait for Peter to come in order for them to receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-19). But at Cornelius', Peter was already there, so the Holy Spirit came upon the first Gentile believers immediately after belief in Jesus.

Verses 45-46—*All the circumcised [Jewish] believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God*—This passage doesn't teach that tongues automatically or normally follow receiving the Spirit. The Spirit granted it on this occasion as the visible proof that He indwelt these Gentiles. Peter and these Jewish believers would be hard to convince. So He granted the same manifestation experienced by the Jewish Christians at Pentecost.

Verses 47-48—*Then Peter answered, "Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?" And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.*—Because Peter *ordered them to be baptized*, it seems the Jewish believers with him did the baptizing, thus participating in this event. Notice the order of events: (1) salvation, (2) receiving the Holy Spirit, (3) water baptism.

- *Then they asked him to stay on for a few days*—As new believers, they asked Peter and the others to stay—to learn about Jesus and have fellowship with them. The Gentiles are now included as equals in the church. The last barrier has fallen. Peter described this in Acts 15:7-8. Now the way was open for the spread of Christianity throughout the Roman world.

Chapter 11

Verse 1—*Now the apostles and the brethren who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God.* As Cornelius requested, Peter stayed with them a few days (Acts 10:48), so the news of the conversion of the Gentiles reached Jerusalem before Peter did.

Verse 2—*And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those who were circumcised* [Jewish Christians] *took issue* [an important topic or problem for debate or discussion] *with him.* It's amazing that there was no rejoicing over the salvation of these Gentiles. Instead, there was anger. Compare this to the response of Barnabas over the salvation of the Gentiles in Antioch (verse 23). As an apostle, Peter now committed the other apostles to a course of action which they thought was wrong.

- Just an observation—Israel's time is almost up. The ministry of the apostles was also almost over. The leadership of the church in Jerusalem was moving into the hands of the elders (11:30; 15:1-4). Men like Paul and Barnabas will be taking the lead. The days of the apostles and the church made up predominantly of Jews was soon to end. The time of Gentile believers has begun. Their thinking at first was that it would be a Jewish church with some Gentiles, but instead, it is going to be a Gentile church with some Jews.

Verse 3—*saying, "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them"*—Even though Cornelius and family and friends became believers, they were still "uncircumcised," the name Jews called non-Jews (Judges 14:3; Ezekiel 32:32). They seem angry because:

1. Peter went to them, i.e., they converted as a result of Peter's ministry (he didn't show up after the fact, like with the Samaritans).
2. He ate with them, against the Mosaic Law (Acts 10:28).
3. They were received into the faith as Gentiles. Peter did not command that they be circumcised (becoming a proselyte) but that they be baptized.

It sounds like they thought salvation was for the Jews alone rather than "to the Jews first."

APPLICATION—"You must be careful that your glorious encounter with God doesn't blind you to what He may be doing outside your experience. You can easily hold in contempt those whose theological views on subjects such as baptism and the Lord's Supper differ from yours, only to discover in eternity that God marvelously used them in fulfilling His will." [Henrichsen, *Seeking to Understand the Christian Life*, p. 78] This is different than warning about false teachers. The challenge is to discern and understand what the Bible says. For example, the Bible has no instructions for the mode of baptism, so it should not be a divisive issue. However, the Bible does state that no one is to add or take away from the revelation that has already been given in the Bible. This is a divisive issue.

Verses 4-15—Instead of arguing with them, Peter simply told them the events leading to the Gentiles' conversion. It is so crucial that the Gentiles also be included with the Jews in the church as the body of Christ, and not be considered another sect of Judaism, that the Holy Spirit inspired Luke to repeat the whole account again.

APPLICATION—Peter's defense was based on what God had done and the way God perceived the Gentiles. Peter had to change his own view to God's point of view. He was forced to see that God thought and acted differently than he, and it was he who must change and bring himself into agreement with God. Jesus said it this way in the Lord's Prayer, *Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven* (Matthew 6:10) and in the Garden, *Father, ... Your will be done* (Matthew 26:42).

Verse 16—*"And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit'"*—This was the promise given by Jesus Himself.

Verse 17—*"Therefore if God gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?"*—They couldn't argue with the

fact that God saved the Gentiles because the Holy Spirit came with the same phenomena as at Pentecost. For Peter to have done anything other than what he did would have been for him to stand in God's way. Peter did not initiate going to the Gentiles, he responded to the clear directions of God.

Verse 18—*When they heard this, they quieted down*—They didn't want to argue with God.

- ***and glorified God, saying, "Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life"***—This is a shocking admission from these Jewish believers and shows that the important issue was the Gospel, not the eating (which will still be an issue in chapter 15). And the real point is not the conversion of one Gentile man but that *God has granted to the Gentiles [as a group] also the repentance that leads to life*.

APPLICATION—The Gospel has priority—it is God's promise and God's possession, and it is His to give to whomever He chooses. The Gospel was for sinners, Jew or Gentile. Those who receive salvation have nothing to boast about but should consider themselves as stewards of the Gospel, i.e., they have the responsibility and duty of sharing it with others. The saint should rejoice at the salvation of any sinner. One of the results of the Gospel is that it is the means by which God changes men's attitude toward others, removing prejudice and replacing it with love.

- Salvation was not for the Jews only. God's purpose was to save the Jews and through them reach the whole world. But they failed. So God would not only save the Gentiles, but He would use the Gentiles to save the world, and finally, to bring the Jews back to Himself as well.

APPLICATION—This is an example of Romans 12:2, *...be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect*. These Jews had a transformed mind and realized what God's will was for the Gentiles and the church. The slowness of heart of the saints, including the apostles, shows us that God does not instantly perfect His saints. Receiving the Holy Spirit does not produce instant maturity, doctrinal accuracy, or spirituality. It's the process of sanctification—knowledge of God's Word and a life of obedience to God's commands that renews the mind and transforms the believer, which proves the will of God—that which is good, acceptable, and perfect, conformed to Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29).

Verse 19—*So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen [see Acts 8:4] made their way to Phoenicia [on the Mediterranean coast, north of Judea, where Tyre and Sidon were located] and Cyprus [the large island in the Mediterranean about 60 miles from the Judean coast] and Antioch [about 200 miles north of Sidon]*. These Jewish believers had evidently left Jerusalem before Peter's encounter with Cornelius.

- ***speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone***—They had the view of the *apostles and the brethren who were throughout Judea* who took issue with Peter over his ministry to the Gentiles (verses 1-3). They were in Antioch, but only spoke to Jews.

Verse 20—*But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene [in North Africa]*—These were the Hellenists, Greek-speaking Jews, more open to preaching to the Gentiles than the Palestinian Jews were. They were also more familiar with the culture and language of those in Antioch.

- ***who came to Antioch***—It was on the Orontes River, about 18 miles upstream. It was founded in 300 B.C. by Seleucus Nicator, first ruler of the Seleucid dynasty, and was named by him after his father Antiochus. When Pompey reorganized Western Asia in 64 B.C., he made Antioch a free city; it became the seat of administration of the Roman province of Syria. It was the third largest city in the Roman Empire (behind Rome, Italy and Alexandria, Egypt). Many Roman trade routes passed through it. The Roman author Cicero described it as a place of learned men and liberal studies. It was also full of pagan worship and sexual immorality. When the Roman satirist Juvenal wanted to aim a barb at Rome, he wrote that the Orontes River emptied its garbage into the Tiber River (near Rome). The debauched prostitution of the temple of Daphne was only five miles away. [MacArthur, *Acts*]

- **and began speaking to the Greeks also, preaching** [Gk. *evangelizo*] **the Lord Jesus**—His life, death, and resurrection, as Peter had told Cornelius. Nothing about the Jewish kingdom (that we heard from Peter at the beginning of Acts).

Verse 21—*And the hand of the Lord was with them*—In the Old Testament, *the hand of the Lord* meant (1) judgment (Exodus 9:33; Deuteronomy 2:15; Joshua 4:24) or (2) blessing (Ezra 7:9; 8:18; Nehemiah 2:8, 18). Obviously, here it means God’s blessing.

- **and a large number who believed turned to the Lord**—Where Jesus Christ was being preached, the response was great—many believed. And when they believed, they *turned to the Lord*, meaning repentance was seen in their changed lives. Not only are Gentiles saved, but now an entire Gentile city is impacted with the Gospel. And it is from Antioch that God launches Paul to bring the Gospel to the Gentile nations.

APPLICATION—These believers did not let the limitations of the apostles be their limitations. As a teacher of the Word of God, my job is NOT to teach you all you need to know. It is to teach you some of what you need to know. I want to communicate a sense of confidence in God and in His Word—to help create a love of learning God’s Word and encourage you in the study of it. The ideal is that you will be equipped to study the Word for yourself, and in those areas of my own prejudice, bias, or blindness, you need not be limited at all. You, like these men of Cyprus and Cyrene, are not limited in your knowledge or obedience to the Word by the limits of your teachers. God does not excuse us for failing to do right or for doing wrong simply because that is the way we were taught or led. Cultists and false teachers do not want you to be left alone with your Bible. They want to tell you what the Bible teaches and thus promote their own distortions of the Word of God above the Word itself (1 John 2:24-27).

Verse 22—*The news about them reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch*—Barnabas was first seen in Acts 4:36-37, *Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement), ... sold it [land] and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet*. Through his influence, Paul was finally accepted by the Jerusalem church (Acts 9:27). Because the Gospel was brought to Antioch by *men of Cyprus*, Barnabas, *of Cyprian birth*, was a good choice to check out the situation. Verse 24 describes his spiritual qualities to discern what was happening. And he would not be perceived as an outsider, but as one of them. Here we see positive leadership by the apostles in Jerusalem. Because of their conclusion in verse 18, based on Peter’s experience with Cornelius, they were able to accept the salvation of these Gentiles at Antioch and send Barnabas there as their representative. He was a gift from the Jerusalem believers to the Antioch believers, not as a ruler but as a leader who serves and teaches them. Antioch was “poor” in leaders and Jerusalem was “rich” in leaders. In verses 27-30 Antioch gives back to Jerusalem, giving to the physical relief of the believers suffering from the famine.

APPLICATION—If you can’t check something out or don’t feel you have the discernment, talk to a mature believer who is able to do that. Be that discerner for your children who aren’t able to do it.

Verse 23—*Then when he arrived and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced*—Their conversions may have worried the Jerusalem Jewish believers, but Barnabas rejoiced.

- **and began to encourage them all with resolute heart** [determined and unwavering] **to remain true to the Lord**—You do that by knowing God’s Word (see John 8:31; 1 John 2:24, 27).

APPLICATION—This is something we need to do with fellow believers—with unwavering hearts, encourage them to remain true to the Lord (and His Word). For example, be careful when showing sympathy to a believer’s situation. Don’t say something that will make them feel sorry for themselves and blame God. Instead, encourage them in this time of testing to be faithful to God.

Verse 24—for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith—Further description of the spiritual maturity of Barnabas.

- ***And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord***—Luke again reports on the progress of the Gospel as it spread as commanded in Acts 1:8.

Verse 25—*And he left for Tarsus*—About 60 miles due west from Antioch, if he crossed the Mediterranean inlet by boat. Barnabas needed help in teaching these *considerable numbers* of people who came to Christ in Antioch.

- ***to look for***—laborious search, used “specially of searching for human beings with an implication of difficulty” [Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*].
- ***Saul***—Several years had passed since Saul fled Jerusalem for his hometown of Tarsus (Acts 9:30). It appears that he had been disinherited for his Christian beliefs (Philippians 3:8) and had probably moved on and was difficult to find.

Verse 26—*and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch*—These two men formed a team in shepherding these new believers in a hostile pagan environment.

APPLICATION—Barnabas was not selfish. He did not seek to build an empire for himself. He did not fear that Saul’s ministry would compete with his own.

- ***And for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers***—The most urgent need of new believers is to be immersed in the Scriptures, being taught by more mature believers. The leaders at Antioch mentioned in chapter 13 are probably their disciples.

APPLICATION—New believers need time to learn God’s Word. Don’t evangelize and leave. Teach them or connect them with someone who will teach them. The Great Commission is to *make disciples* (Matthew 28:19-20), not just converts.

- ***and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch***—The church was a new entity, distinct from Judaism. The one unifying element was Christ. Peter later wrote, *but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name* (1 Peter 4:16).

Verses 27-28—*Now at this time some prophets*—Why more than one prophet? Paul later wrote, *And let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment* (1 Corinthians 14:29). So they confirmed Agabus’ prophecy. Like the apostles, the prophets (with a word from God) gradually faded from the scene as the Scriptures were written (see 1 Corinthians 13:9-10).

- ***came down from Jerusalem*** [down from the hills and north] ***to Antioch. One of them named Agabus*** [mentioned again in Acts 21:10-14] ***stood up and began to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world.***
- ***And this took place in the reign of Claudius***—from A.D. 41-54. The years 45-46 had great famines in Israel. Several ancient writers mention that, such as Tacitus (*Annals* XI.43), Josephus (*Antiquities* XX.ii.5), and Suetonius (*Claudius* 18).

Verse 29—*And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea*—It’s obvious that these Gentile believers were united with the Jewish believers into one body of Christ. When the Jewish believers needed help, the Gentile believers were quick to send a contribution to help them.

APPLICATION—The famine was *all over the world*—that means it was in Antioch, too. Although they would be suffering from the famine, too, yet they gave sacrificially to the believers in Jerusalem. And no one told them to do it. It was their own idea. (Obviously, Barnabas, a man known for his generosity [Acts 4:36-37], had taught them well!) They also gave across country borders—from Syria to Judea. Here is part of the pattern of giving in the New Testament: [1] *he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and* [2] *he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.* [3] *Each one* [4] *must do just as he has purposed in his heart,* [5] *not grudgingly* [bitterness or hard feelings] *or* [6] *under compulsion*

[being forced against your wishes], [7] *for God loves a cheerful* [noticeably happy, sunny, glad] *giver* (2 Corinthians 9:6-7).

Verse 30—*And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders*—This trip is mentioned in Acts 12:25.

This gift was delivered in charge of Barnabas and Saul—men the believers in Antioch trusted.

Chapter 12

Herod the Great ruled Judea from 47 B.C. to 37 B.C. He was named “King of the Jews” by Antony, Octavius, and the Roman Senate. He ruled all of Palestine from 37 until his death shortly after the birth of Jesus (Matthew 2:15). He executed one of his wives, Mariamne, her mother, and three of his sons (the last one just five days before his own death). Just before his death, he commanded that prominent Jewish leaders be slaughtered when he died, ensuring that the people would, therefore, be in mourning. However, that order was not carried out. He had also ordered the slaughter of the innocent children in Bethlehem in an attempt to kill the true King of the Jews (Matthew 2:16).

Herod Agrippa (in Act 12) was the grandson of Herod the Great (who had murdered Agrippa’s father, Aristobulus). He reigned from 37 A.D. to 44 A.D. The Apostle Paul would stand trial before his son, Agrippa II. Agrippa I was raised and educated in Rome but was on shaky ground with the Romans. He ran up numerous debts in Rome and then fled to Palestine, leaving angry creditors behind. He made unwise comments about the Roman emperor Tiberius, who promptly imprisoned him. When Tiberius died, Agrippa was released from prison and made ruler of northern Palestine (Luke 3:1), to which Judea and Samaria were eventually added in 41 A.D. He ruled the largest territory of Palestine since Herod the Great nearly fifty years earlier. One way to win favor with the Jewish authorities was for him to persecute the hated sect of Christians. [MacArthur, *Acts*].

Verses 1-2—*Now about that time* [of the famine mentioned in 11:27-28 and before Saul and Barnabas returned to Antioch from Jerusalem in 12:25] ***Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church in order to mistreat them and he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword***—This is the Apostle James, brother of the Apostle John. He is the first Apostle to be martyred, and the only Apostle (apart from Judas) whose death is recorded in the New Testament.

Verse 3—*When he saw that it pleased the Jews*—In Acts 4, the Sanhedrin was worried about offending the crowd when they arrested Peter and John (verses 16-17). But now the masses of Jews, it seems, have changed their attitude toward the church and the apostles.

- ***he proceeded to arrest Peter also***—The previous Herod (and Pilate) seemed unconvinced of Jesus’ guilt and only put Him to death because of political pressure. This Herod, for some unstated reason, acted on his own initiative and for his own purposes in killing James and arresting and planning to kill Peter.
- Two possible reasons for this change in the attitude of the people:
 1. The apostles were traveling to other places like Samaria, Joppa, and Caesarea, so their signs and wonders were not as frequent, so the people may have lost their fear or reverence for them.
 2. The salvation of the “non-Jews” may have been offensive to these Jews and made them angry.
 3. The Hellenistic Jews were gaining prominence and power over the native Hebrew Jews.
- ***Now it was during the days of Unleavened Bread***—the weekly feast following Passover, when Jerusalem would be crowded with devout Jewish pilgrims.

Verse 4—*When he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him to four squads of soldiers to guard him*—intense security measures taken by Herod to assure that Peter does not escape again. He has no intention of being embarrassed by the disappearance of a prisoner, as was the Sanhedrin (Acts 5:19). Each squad had four soldiers, so 16 soldiers were assigned to guard Peter. They rotated—at any given time, two were chained to Peter in the cell and two were on guard outside of the cell.

- ***intending after the Passover to bring him out before the people***—after the busyness of the holi-

day but before the pilgrims left Jerusalem. It is evidently the reason Peter was still in prison and not martyred already, as James was.

Verse 5—*So Peter was kept in the prison*—for the week

- ***but***—Luke sets all of the opposition of the Jews and their king in contrast to the prayers of the believers and the power of God.
- ***prayer for him was being made fervently***—“fervently” is a medical term used to describe stretching a muscle to its limit. It was used of Christ’s prayer in Gethsemane, when *being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground* (Luke 22:44).
- ***by the church to God***—“church” is believers gathered in the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark (verse 12), evidently with no leaders present (verse 17).

APPLICATION—What else could the believers do? God restricted their actions to only prayer and faith in Him.

Verse 6—*On the very night when Herod was about to bring him forward*—The final night of his imprisonment before his planned execution.

APPLICATION—God often uses timing that gives Him the most glory. For example, Moses is born and saved by God when Pharaoh was killing the Israelite boy babies.

- ***Peter was sleeping between two soldiers***—Peter could sleep in the confidence that if God wanted him delivered from prison, He would deliver him (as He had done before). Therefore, neither the hardness of the floor, the awful conditions of the prison, the guards watching him, or his pending execution disturbed his sleep.
- ***bound with two chains, and guards in front of the door were watching over the prison***

Verse 7—*And behold, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared and a light shone in the cell*—even the light shining in the cell did not wake Peter.

- ***and he struck Peter’s side and woke him up***—he was really soundly, deeply asleep.
- ***saying, “Get up quickly.” And his chains fell off his hands.***

Verse 8—*And the angel said to him, “Gird yourself and put on your sandals”*—Being quickly awoken from sleep and not knowing what was next, the angel told him to get dressed.

- ***And he did so. And he said to him, “Wrap your cloak around you and follow me.”***

Verse 9—*And he went out and continued to follow, and he did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision*, i.e., that maybe he was dreaming.

Verse 10—*When they had passed the first and second guard*—Not one of the guards was conscious of what was happening. God supernaturally deadened their sense or consciousness so that they were completely unaware of what was happening.

- ***they came to the iron gate that leads into the city, which opened for them by itself; and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel departed from him***—the angel had done his job (Hebrews 1:14), so he left. No prison can hold someone in whom God wants out.

Verse 11—*When Peter came to himself, he said, “Now I know for sure that the Lord has sent forth His angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting”* (Peter’s execution).

APPLICATION—It was God’s timing for James to die. It was not God’s timing for Peter to die. Ecclesiastes 3:1-2 says, *There is an appointed time for everything ...and a time to die.* In Psalm 139:16 says, *...in Your book were all written the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them.* Our moment of death was ordained by God in eternity past.

Verse 12—*And when he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying*—That Peter knew to go there to find the believers seems to indicate that perhaps they had gathered there regularly.

Verse 13—*When he knocked at the door of the gate, a servant-girl named Rhoda came to answer*—Mary must have been wealthy because she had a servant-girl and she had a large enough house to hold many believers who had come there to pray.

Verses 14-15—*When she recognized Peter’s voice, because of her joy she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter was standing in front of the gate. They said to her, “You are out of your mind!” But she kept insisting that it was so. They kept saying, “It is his angel.”*

Verse 16—*But Peter continued knocking; and when they had opened the door, they saw him and were amazed.*

Verse 17—*But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had led him out of the prison.*

- *And he said, “Report these things to James and the brethren”*—This would be James, Jesus’ half-brother (Acts 15), who emerged as a leader in the Jerusalem church.
- *Then he left and went to another place*—Luke does not tell us where Peter went. There is a brief appearance of him at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, then Peter disappears. The rest of Acts revolves around Paul and his ministry.

Verse 18—*Now when day came, there was no small disturbance among the soldiers as to what could have become of Peter*—Soldiers who lost prisoners were in serious trouble (see Acts 16:27; 27:42).

Verse 19—*When Herod had searched for him and had not found him, he examined the guards and ordered that they be led away to execution*—Because God had supernaturally prevented the guards from seeing Peter’s miraculous rescue, they had no explanation for what had happened. Herod must have concluded that it was an “inside job.” There was no way Peter could simply walk out past all those guards. Therefore, the guards are guilty and had to be put to death.

- *Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and was spending time there*—Caesarea was the seat of the Roman government in Palestine.

Verse 20—*Now he was very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon*—The people of Tyre and Sidon were not under Herod’s realm but they were recipients of government aid which seems to have been distributed by Herod. We’re not told why Herod was angry with them. But evidently, because of his anger, he had cut off aid to their country. They were desperate to get that aid.

- *and with one accord they came to him, and having won over Blastus the king’s chamberlain*—probably for a price, Blastus agreed to be the intermediary between them and Herod.
- *they were asking for peace, because their country was fed by the king’s country.*

Verse 21—*On an appointed day Herod, having put on his royal apparel, took his seat on the rostrum and began delivering an address to them*—According to the Jewish historian Josephus, the

occasion was a feast in honor of Herod's patron, the Roman Emperor Claudius. They met in the amphitheater built by Agrippa's grandfather, Herod the Great. Josephus describes the scene: "[Herod] put on a garment made wholly of silver, and of a contexture truly wonderful, and came into the theatre early in the morning; at which time the silver of his garment being illuminated by the fresh reflection of the sun's rays upon it, shone out after a surprising manner" (*Antiquities* XIX, vii, 2).

Verse 22—*The people kept crying out, "The voice of a god and not of a man!"*—Josephus writes that Herod "did neither rebuke them, nor reject their impious flattery" (*Ibid.*).

Verse 23—*And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him*—his failure to reject such adoration and worship was the same as accepting this statement as true.

- ***and he was eaten by worms and died.*** Dr. Jean Sloat Morton writes:

The phrase "eaten of worms," in Greek is *skolakobrotos*. The root word *skolax* means "a specific head structure of a tapeworm." Since the word *scolex* (plural *scolices*) is applied to the head of tapeworms, Herod's death was almost certainly due to the rupture of a cyst formed by a tapeworm. There are several kinds of tapeworms, but one of the most common ones found in sheep-growing countries is the dog tape, *Echinococcus granulosus*. The heaviest infections come from areas where sheep and cattle are raised. Sheep and cattle serve as intermediate hosts for the parasite. The dog eats the infected meat, then man gets the eggs from the dog, usually by fecal contamination of hair.

The disease is characterized by the formation of cysts, generally on the right lobe of the liver; these may extend down into the abdominal cavity. The rupture of such a cyst may release as many as two million *scolices*. The developing worms inside of the cysts are called *scolices*, because the anterior region constitutes the major part of development of this stage. When the cyst ruptures, the entrance of cellular debris along with the *scolices* may cause sudden death.

The use of the word *scolex* is not limited to this reference about Herod; the term also appears in Mark 9:44. A literal translation of the phrase in Mark 9:44 would read, "where their *scolex* dieth not." This usage is very interesting because the tapeworm keeps propagating itself. Each section of the worm is a self-contained unit which has both male and female parts. The posterior part matures and forms hundreds of worm eggs. The word *scolex* in this text portrays a biological description of permanence which the text demands for the comparison. (*Science in the Bible*, Moody Press, 1978, pp. 261-62).

- According to Josephus, Herod lingered on for five days, in terrible pain.
- ***because he did not give God the glory***—This is the crime for which God executed him (in A.D. 44).

APPLICATION—It is the same crime for which all those who reject God will be condemned. Instead of giving God the glory, men worship God's creation (Romans 1:18-23).

Verse 24—*But the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied*—In spite of the opposition of the Jewish masses and King Herod.

APPLICATION—Jesus said, *...I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it* (Matthew 16:18). God never said that we were to build the church or that man could destroy the church or keep it from being built.

Verse 25—*And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission*—of bringing famine relief to Jerusalem from Antioch (Acts 11:30).

- ***taking along with them John, who was also called Mark***—From Colossians 4:10, we learn that John Mark was Barnabas' cousin. He went with Barnabas and Saul on their mission to Jerusalem and on their first missionary journey (Acts 13:5). John Mark left them (for some unknown rea-

son) on that journey, which resulted in a split between Paul and Barnabas in Acts 15:36-40). It in the house of his mother Mary that the believers gathered to pray for Peter's release (12:12).

With these verses, the rest of Acts focuses on the ministry of Saul (Paul).

Near the end of his life, Peter wrote these words to us: *“Therefore, I will always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you already know them, and have been established in the truth which is present with you. I consider it right, as long as I am in this earthly dwelling, to stir you up by way of reminder, knowing that the laying aside of my earthly dwelling is imminent, as also our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. And I will also be diligent that at any time after my departure you will be able to call these things to mind. For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, ‘This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased,’ and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain”* (2 Peter 1:12-18).

“Be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless...be on your guard lest, being carried away by the error of unprincipled men, you fall from your own steadfastness, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity, Amen” (2 Peter 3:14, 17-18).