

# Abounding Grace Christian Church

## The Acts of the Holy Spirit through the Church – Part 36

### I. Exposition of Chapter Eleven.

#### A. Verses 1-18 - Peter defends his actions of taking the Gospel to the Gentiles.

1. As was mentioned in **Part 34**, Peter was wise to take some witnesses with him when he went to Cornelius' house (cf. **10:23**). Somehow, either by the Holy Spirit or because he just knew the Jerusalem believers so well, he knew that he would be challenged for it.

2. **Verse 1** – “**Now the apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God.**” - It didn't take long for the news to spread to Judea that the Gentiles had “...received the word of God.” The word “received” means; “**to readily receive information and to regard it as true—to receive readily, to accept, to believe.**”<sup>1</sup> Dr. Stanley Horton adds:

**“This means they welcomed it, acknowledging its truth and accepting its message of repentance, forgiveness, and salvation. This was striking news, and to some of the Jews was probably not good news. Such news travels fast and reached the apostles and the rest of the believers in Jerusalem before Peter returned!”<sup>2</sup>**

**“NOW THE apostles (special messengers) and the brethren who were throughout Judea heard [with astonishment] that the Gentiles (heathen) also had received and accepted and welcomed the Word of God [the doctrine concerning the attainment through Christ of salvation in the kingdom of God].” – Acts 11:1 – Amplified Bible**

3. **Verse 2** – “...those of the circumcision contended with him,” – The “circumcision” refers to Jewish Christians who still held to the law to a great extent. It's important to understand that this idea of the Gentiles being able to receive the Messiah and have a relationship with God was completely foreign to everything they had ever learned.

**“Keep in mind that these Jewish believers did not yet understand the relationship between Law and grace, Jews and Gentiles, and Israel and the church. Most Christians today understand these truths; but, after all, we have Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, and Hebrews! There were many converted priests in the church who would be zealous for the Law (Acts 6:7), and even the ordinary Jewish believer would have a difficult time making the transition (Acts 21:20). It was not only a matter of religion, but also of culture; and cultural habits are very hard to break.”<sup>3</sup>**

a. Several expositors make the point that this was a very serious development and could have led to a split in the early church. The word “contended” means; “**to separate one's self in a hostile spirit, to oppose, strive with dispute, contend.**”<sup>4</sup>

4. **Verse 3** – “...saying, ‘**You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!**’” – Eating with Gentiles was a large part of the problem here because it was considered to be defilement. Dr. Bob Utley gives some insight about this:

**“This issue of table fellowship was very important to Jewish people. This may be the very issue behind the food laws of Lev. 11. Jews were not to share any social event with Canaanites. Eating in the ancient Near East was a kind of covenant of fellowship. Jesus had been accused of a similar breach of tradition in Matt. 9:11; 11:19; Luke 5:30; 15:2.”<sup>5</sup>**

a. Regarding the fact that these Jewish believers were extremely upset, Horton (and others) suggest that they were also fearful that this could stir up more persecution. Horton writes:

**“It is quite probable they were also upset because they feared that Peter's action might turn the unconverted Jews against them and bring to an end the period of peace they had been enjoying (see 9:31). Besides rejecting Peter, they were more concerned about themselves than about the spread of the gospel.”<sup>6</sup>**

5. **Verses 4-15 – Peter explains himself.** – The fact that much of the account found in **chapter 10** is mentioned again by the Holy Spirit through Luke, demonstrates what an important event this was.

<sup>1</sup>Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 371.

<sup>2</sup>Stanley M. Horton, *Acts: A Logion Press Commentary* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2001), 209.

<sup>3</sup>Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 447–448.

<sup>4</sup>Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Being Grimm's Wilke's Clavis Novi Testamenti* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House., 1977)

<sup>5</sup>Robert James Utley, *Luke the Historian: The Book of Acts*, vol. Volume 3B, Study Guide Commentary Series (Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International, 2003), 144.

<sup>6</sup>Horton, 209.

a. **Verse 15 – “And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning.”** – In this statement, Peter is stating that the Holy Spirit “fell upon” those non-Jewish people as they believed “...as upon us at the beginning.” This is in reference to the event of **Acts 2:1-4** when the 120 were gathered together on the day of Pentecost. Kevin J. Conner articulates wonderfully the work of the Holy Spirit in this entire account:

**“Peter testifies to the fact that it was not him but THE HOLY SPIRIT Himself who had led him to go to the Gentiles, and settled for him the whole matter of the Gentiles coming into blessing in the Gospel. It was *the Spirit* who gave the Vision to Peter, vs. 4-10. It was *the Spirit* who sent the Angel to Cornelius. Vs. 11. It was *the Spirit* who told Peter that He had sent the men. *The Spirit* told Peter to go with the men, doubting nothing. *The Spirit* Himself fell on the Gentiles as they heard Peter preach the Word. Vs. 12-13. The Holy Spirit had manifested Himself in other tongues, exactly as He had on the Day of Pentecost in the Upper Room Disciples. Vs. 15-16.”<sup>7</sup>**

6. **Verses 16-18 - Peter concludes his argument and the Jewish Christians have a change of heart.** a. **Verse 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 added something we didn’t know before. When the Gentile believers had the Holy Spirit fall upon them, Peter remembered what Jesus had said as is recorded in **Acts 1:5**. This is partially a fulfillment of something else Jesus promised as is recorded in **John 14:26** that when the Holy Spirit would come He would bring to our remembrance what Jesus had said.

b. **Verse 17 –** Notice Peter calls this experience of the Baptism with the Holy Spirit the “...the same gift...” that they had received.

**“Same’ in the Greek means ‘equal’ or ‘identical.’ This is significant because the convincing evidence was not wind or fire (which preceded only the Pentecostal outpouring of the Spirit and was not actually a part of it). The Jewish believers needed a convincing evidence, and the one convincing evidence given was the fact they spoke in other tongues and praised God (Acts 10:46).”<sup>8</sup>**

1) Peter ends his argument by saying, “...who was I that I could withstand God?” – The English Standard Version reads; “...who was I that I could stand in God's way?”

c. **Verse 18 – “When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, ‘Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.’”** – It’s clear here that Peter made a very valid and powerful argument. God orchestrated the entire thing and the Jewish believers couldn’t deny it. First, “...they became silent...” – This could mean that they were so stunned they couldn’t think of anything more to say. The NET Bible seems to support what some other scholars say; **“but this would create an apparent contradiction with the subsequent action of praising God. The point, in context, is that they ceased objecting to what Peter had done.”<sup>9</sup>**

1) Note they finally realized that God had granted the opportunity for “...repentance to life.” to the Gentiles. This means that non-Jews could repent and receive eternal life through Jesus Christ. This also meant, they didn’t need to be circumcised, refrain from certain foods or keep the law in any way to have a relationship with God! This was difficult for the Jews to accept.

## **B. Verses 19-30 – Barnabas, Saul and the Church at Antioch.**

### **1. Verses 19-21 - The church in Antioch grows as Gentiles turn to the Lord.**

a. **Verse 19 - - “Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only.”** – This brings us back to Stephen (**8:1-2**) and points to another result of him being martyred. We know that his death caused a scattering of the believers and we saw Philip taking the Gospel to Samaria (**8:4-25**) and leading an Ethiopian to the Lord (**8:26-39**). Now we see that the Gospel also spread to other Gentile lands (**Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch**).

b. **“...preaching the word to no one by the Jews only.”** - At first, Christians scattered over the Roman Empire preached only to Jews. But they eventually began to preach Jesus Christ to Gentiles as well. c. **Verse 20**

– It seems that most expositors agree that the “Hellenists” mentioned here are not Greek speaking Jews as we saw mentioned in 6:1 but is referring to “Greeks” or Gentiles.

**“However, some of the believers who went to Antioch from Cyprus and Cyrene began preaching to the Gentiles about the Lord Jesus.” – Acts 11:20 - NLT**

<sup>7</sup>Kevin J. Conner, *The Book of Acts* (Portland, OR: Bible Press, 1973), 79.

<sup>8</sup>Horton, 211.

<sup>9</sup>Biblical Studies Press, *The NET Bible First Edition; Bible. English. NET Bible.; The NET Bible* (Biblical Studies Press, 2005).