

Acts 11:1-18 (NLT) - Scripture and Outline
January 10, 2021 - 9:45 and 11:15 A.M.

Scripture:

1 Soon the news reached the apostles and other believers[a] in Judea that the Gentiles had received the word of God. **2** But when Peter arrived back in Jerusalem, the Jewish believers[b] criticized him. **3** “You entered the home of Gentiles[c] and even ate with them!” they said.

4 Then Peter told them exactly what had happened. **5** “I was in the town of Joppa,” he said, “and while I was praying, I went into a trance and saw a vision. Something like a large sheet was let down by its four corners from the sky. And it came right down to me. **6** When I looked inside the sheet, I saw all sorts of tame and wild animals, reptiles, and birds. **7** And I heard a voice say, ‘Get up, Peter; kill and eat them.’

8 “No, Lord,’ I replied. ‘I have never eaten anything that our Jewish laws have declared impure or unclean.[d]’

9 “But the voice from heaven spoke again: ‘Do not call something unclean if God has made it clean.’ **10** This happened three times before the sheet and all it contained was pulled back up to heaven.

11 “Just then three men who had been sent from Caesarea arrived at the house where we were staying. **12** The Holy Spirit told me to go with them and not to worry that they were Gentiles. These six brothers here accompanied me, and we soon entered the home of the man who had sent for us. **13** He told us how an angel had appeared to him in his home and had told him, ‘Send messengers to Joppa, and summon a man named Simon Peter. **14** He will tell you how you and everyone in your household can be saved!’

15 “As I began to speak,” Peter continued, “the Holy Spirit fell on them, just as he fell on us at the beginning. **16** Then I thought of the Lord’s words when he said, ‘John baptized with[e] water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ **17** And since God gave these Gentiles the same gift he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to stand in God’s way?”

18 When the others heard this, they stopped objecting and began praising God. They said, “We can see that God has also given the Gentiles the privilege of repenting of their sins and receiving eternal life.”

Footnotes

11:1 Greek brothers.

11:2 Greek those of the circumcision.

11:3 Greek of uncircumcised men.

11:8 Greek anything common or unclean.

11:16 Or *in*; also in 11:16b.

Outline:

1. Greet one another, begin with prayer, and read Acts 11:1-18.

2. Remind the class about the events of Acts 9:32—10:48.

3. Discuss the accusations against Peter in Acts 11:1-4.

—At headquarters, news has spread quickly; Jewish Christians quite concerned

- Discussion by the larger body ensures that an apostle doesn't go off on a tangent
- Peter called to explain his actions by “the circumcision party” (v. 4, ESV)
- *Peter could have insisted, “I'm an apostle, so I don't need to explain myself to you.” Why is it good that he did not respond in this way? What can we learn from him?*
- *What difficult conversations between Christians are vitally needed today? How can we hold such conversations in ways that “speak the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15)?*

4. Discuss Peter's advocacy for his actions in Acts 11:5-17.

- Peter admits his deeds; Jewish concern no longer relevant in light of God's actions
- Peter tells the story we know already from Acts 9:32 – 10:48; accurate repetition and the presence of six witnesses confirm the story's validity
- Four important divine initiatives shared in the story:
 1. Peter's vision in light of his initial reluctance
 2. Providential visit from Cornelius' men
 3. Cornelius' own vision and experience
 4. The Spirit coming upon the Gentiles “just as on us” (v. 15, ESV)
- Peter's conclusion: “who was I that I could stand in God's way?” (v. 17, ESV)
- Ajith Fernando, *NIV Application Commentary: Acts*, pp. 342-343: “The history of missions has many examples of people like Cornelius, who, after sincerely seeking for God, have an opportunity to hear and respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ. One day in the early part of this century [the 20th], a chief in Malaysia was repairing one of his wooden idols when he told his wife, ‘This is foolish. Here we are worshiping these wooden objects, but our hands are greater than they are. Surely there must be a high Being, the God who created all of us. Let us worship him.’ So for twenty-five years they went into their prayer room every day and prayed to ‘the unknown God.’ One day a Christian missionary came along and introduced the chief and his wife to the Bible and to Christ. When they heard the good news, they rejoiced and said, ‘This is the true God we have been seeking all these years. We now believe in Him.’ The couple had responded to the light they received through creation (see Rom. 1:19-20) and began a search that resulted in their hearing and accepting the gospel.”
- *How does Peter concentrate on God's initiative and not his own? Why is this focus both theologically and practically necessary? What does it say to us today?*
- *Throughout human history, people have opposed God's way. When have you done this? How did you come to see your error, repent, and go with God rather than against Him?*

5. Discuss the early church's response to Gentile evangelism in Acts 11:18.

- The apostles and others fall silent at the significance of what they've heard
- Silence is not necessarily agreement by all but at least acquiescence (see Acts 15, 21)
- Not a one-time exception for a God-fearer and family, but a change for all time
- *How and why is your life different because what happened in Acts 11:1-18? Reflect upon and elaborate on at least two different ways.*
- *The early church had to tackle the issue of Gentile believers numerous times. What does this historical reality say to us about how God works? What issues do we present-day Christians have to work on? What are our blind spots? Ways forward?*

6. Close in prayer.