

# *How to Read the Bible for All its Worth*

## Lesson 6e: Acts 9:32-12:25 – Opening the Door to the Gentiles

### *Introduction*

Racism is not a new phenomena, but has existed in different forms for thousands of years. One such example is the attitude the Jewish people had towards Gentiles (non-Jews) during the Biblical times. Coming out of a racist culture is a hard mental transition for anyone. That is exactly what God leads Peter to do in this passage of Scripture. He takes not only Peter, but a whole group of people out of bigotry and into a mode of reaching out to a people who they had previously despised. Only God can make a change like that!

### *Acts 9:32-43 – Peter's Journeys in Lydda, Sharon, and Joppa*

What effect did the healing of paralyzed man have on Peter's ministry there?

People saw that he was healed and believed the message Peter preached.

How can we see this same principle at work today?

When people see the changed lives of believers, they are inclined to believe the message of the gospel.

Why did Peter pray before reviving Tabitha?

As with any spiritual gift, Peter had the ability to use and abuse it. Peter desired to know whether it was the Lord's will for him to heal Tabitha before he used the revived her.

### *Acts 10:1-23 – Cornelius the Gentile, and Peter's Vision*

What was Cornelius' nationality and why is that significant to this passage?

Cornelius was Italian. More specifically, he was a Gentile.

How could Cornelius' spiritual life be characterized?

He believed in the God of the Old Testament and sought to worship Him, praying, giving money, and living by His commandments. He was not, however, a full Jewish convert. He had a seeking heart!

What was Cornelius' position in society?

He was a centurion and head of the Italian battalion. He had servants and was obviously a influential man of significant position. In a battalion of 6,000, each centurion would command a separate force of 100 men.

What was significant about God telling Peter that he could eat four-footed animals, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air? See Leviticus 11:9-31.

The dietary laws passed down from the Lord in the Old Testament were being lifted. Those things which were before counted as "unclean" were now considered clean and could be eaten.

Why did Peter have this vision three times?

The Lord did this to emphasize that this wasn't just a dream, but that it was indeed a vision from Him. God wanted to get His point across to Peter.

Why did God work in both Peter and Cornelius to bring this meeting to pass?

This was such a significant event and a pivotal change in the thinking of both Peter and Cornelius that God manifested Himself to both of them to bring this meeting to pass and to prepare both of them to have open hearts to what He was doing.

Why did Peter take some of the brethren from Joppa with him to Caesarea. See 2 Cor. 13:1,

Peter knew something very significant was about to happen and was probably putting together his vision and the request to visit a Gentile. Peter knew that he would need some other witnesses to help convince the other Christians that he would have to face when he returned.

# *How to Read the Bible for All its Worth*

## Lesson 6e: Acts 9:32-12:25 – Opening the Door to the Gentiles

### Acts 10:24-48 – *The Gospel Preached to Cornelius and Friends*

What connection did Peter make between his vision concerning the unclean foods and God's intention towards Gentiles.

God taught Peter that he was not to call any man unholy or unclean, even Gentiles.

Peter makes a very profound statement concerning the Gentiles in verses 34 and 35. What does this mean and what are the implications of this statement?

God is not partial between Jews and non-Jews but desires that all be saved. This statement implies that everyone who uses the knowledge they have to seek after the Lord will have the opportunity to find Him.

Is Peter's call to go to Cornelius consistent with what Peter stated in verses 34 and 35?

Yes. Cornelius sought the Lord with his whole household. God saw their desire to know Him and made sure they were given sufficient opportunity to hear the truth.

The answer to the question of whether Cornelius was already saved is very important to our understanding of the place of the gospel in salvation. Was Cornelius saved before the gospel was preached to him? Is the gospel really necessary for salvation? See also Romans 1:16.

The fact that the Lord sent Peter to Cornelius implies that they needed more than good intentions toward God to have eternal life. He needed the gospel! He and his family had very receptive hearts and were saved while Peter was preaching. Everyone needs to hear the gospel in order to be saved. There is no salvation without it!

The key principle to understand regarding God calling all men to repentance is that everyone has some level of revelation. Whether it is being raised in church or being in a remote village in the heart of a pagan nation, God reveals Himself to all men. Read Romans 1:18-23. How does God reveal Himself outside of His Word?

God reveals His existence to us through nature – we can look around and determine that there is an intelligent designer. We also have a conscience that senses right and wrong. This exists for all men, world over. This indicates that there is an absolute moral code. What you do with that information determines whether God reveals more to you.

While Peter was still preaching, the Holy Spirit came upon the Gentiles gathered there and they began to exhibit spiritual gifts, particularly speaking in tongues. What had just happened here?

These people got saved and in typical fashion, received the Holy Spirit at the same time. This was the way it was to always be. The Holy Spirit is received at salvation. They began speaking in tongues, probably as a sign to Peter and the other Jews that God desired to include them in the church as well.

Why was the Gentiles receipt of the Holy Spirit different than the Samaritans in Acts 8:14-17?

The Samaritans were saved when Phillip, who was not an apostle, was present and preaching down there. He went ahead and baptized them. However, more witnesses, preferably apostles, needed to be present to see that it was God's intention to include them in the church. With Cornelius, Peter and six other brethren were present to witness.

### Acts 11:1-18 – *The Gentiles Accepted by the Brethren*

What was the response of the Jewish Christians back in Jerusalem?

They were upset with Peter for going into a Gentile's home and eating with them.

How did the Lord communicate to Cornelius to arrange this meeting?

He sent an angel to talk to Cornelius

How did the Lord communicate to Peter to arrange this meeting?

He gave Peter a vision and used the Holy Spirit to lead him there.

# How to Read the Bible for All its Worth

## Lesson 6e: Acts 9:32-12:25 – Opening the Door to the Gentiles

Why is the difference significant?

Peter was definitely saved and therefore had the Spirit of God dwelling within him. The Lord spoke to Peter internally through the Spirit to arrange this meeting. Cornelius was not a saved individual and therefore did not have the Spirit of God within him. To arrange this meeting, the Lord sent an angel to speak to Cornelius. The Lord has sent angels to saved individuals at times (Daniel, Mary, Joseph, etc...), but the different means of communication during the same event demonstrates a spiritual difference between them.

What was the response of the Jewish Christians to Peter's explanation?

God impressed upon them that this was His will and they accepted it with all gladness.

### Acts 11:19-30 – Growth of the Gentile Movement

This passage begins by taking us back to the martyrdom of Stephen in Acts 7, and picks up with many of the Jewish Christians that scattered because of the persecution that came from the Jews. They went northward to Phoenicia, the island of Cyprus (about 60 miles off shore from Tyre and Sidon) and about 200 miles past Tyre and Sidon to Antioch, the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest city in the Roman empire. Antioch was known for its great education, liberal studies, pagan idolatry, and sexual immorality.

The Jewish Christians that left Jerusalem only preached to other Jews while other Jews of Cyprus and Cyrene began preaching to Gentiles in Antioch. Why do you suppose these men were willing to do this?

These were not Jews from Palestine (Israel), but were Greek Jews. They were used to living in the Greek culture and Greek was their native language. It was more natural for them to speak to other Gentiles, with whom they shared many similarities.

Who was Barnabas and why was he a good choice to send to Antioch?

1. (Acts 4:36) Barnabas was from Cyprus and would fit in with the others
2. (Acts 4:37) He was a sold-out believer
3. (Acts 9:26-27) He wasn't afraid of outsiders and was a compassionate person
4. (Acts 11:22-23) He was obviously a strong pastor and teacher
5. (Acts 11:24) He was a good and godly man, full of the Spirit

Why would Barnabas go and seek out Saul to help him with this ministry? See Acts 9:15-16

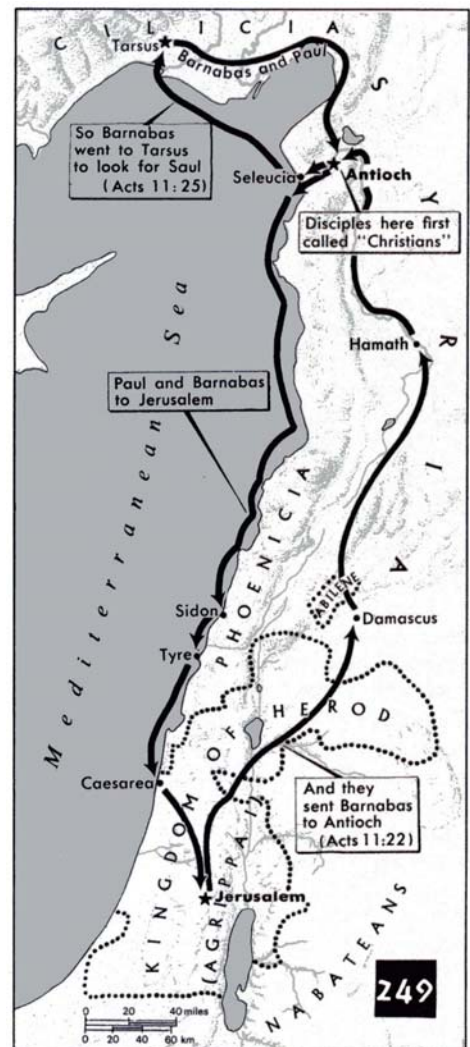
Barnabas, being a close friend of Saul, would have known that his long-term ministry was to be to the Gentiles. As the gospel is reaching out to this people, it would be important for Saul to be involved and get his feet wet in the ministry to the Gentiles.

What did Barnabas and Saul do in Antioch? What relevance does this have to this work?

The ministry of a pastor is to teach and equip the saints for the work of the ministry. This is what we are doing!

What does the name, "Christian" reflect about the focus of this people?

They were focused on Jesus Christ! He was their central theme.



# *How to Read the Bible for All its Worth*

## Lesson 6e: Acts 9:32-12:25 – Opening the Door to the Gentiles

What was the role of prophets in the early New Testament church?

They gave new revelation, sometimes referring to doctrine and sometimes referring to events that would take place.

In what manner was a collection taken from the Church at Antioch?

It was totally optional. It wasn't required by those coming from Jerusalem. Everyone gave as they had the means to do so. This is an example of the independence of local churches. It is also an example of the love we should have for others

### *Acts 12:1-19 – Renewed Persecution and the Release of Peter*

Concerning the death of James, it is said, "When this James was brought to the tribunal seat, he that brought him and was the cause of his trouble, seeing him to be condemned and that he should suffer death, was in such sort moved therewith in his heart and conscience that as he went to the execution he confessed himself also, of his own accord, to be a Christian. And so were they led forth together, where in the way he desired of James to forgive him what he had done. After that James had a little paused with himself upon the matter, turning to him he saith, 'Peace be to thee, brother;' and kissed him. And both were beheaded together, A.D. 36"<sup>1</sup>

What was Herod's motivation for executing James and arresting Peter?

It was entirely political.

Why did he pick the time of Unleavened Bread (Passover) to do this?

Jerusalem would have thousands of visitors, maximizing his political exposure to Jews.

**Note:** quaternions consist of four soldiers, yielding a total of 16 that were guarding Peter

What does Peter's deep sleep on the night of his execution teach us about faith? See John 21:17-19, and 1 Peter 5:7.

He trusted in Jesus' prophesy concerning his death. True faith removes worry.

What was the church's response to Peter's imprisonment?

They sought the Lord diligently in prayer. We see later, down in verse 12 that many had gathered together for a prayer meeting. This was not an assembly of the whole church, just a group of people within the church that got together to call out on God.

What do verses 14-15 teach us about angels and the saints?

It implies that believers have guardian angels.

Who is the James spoken of in verse 17? Why is this significant?

This was James, the half brother of Jesus. Apparently he had risen to a position of prominence in the early church there in Jerusalem.

### *Acts 12:20-25 – King Herod's Death*

What is ironic about the timing of the angel of the Lord striking Herod?

It was perhaps his moment of greatest pride and self-glory. (see *Antiquities* XIX, viii, 2)

What object lesson can we learn from the death of Herod?

We cannot fight against God and win.

### *Assignment:*

Read Acts 13:1 – 15:35 in preparation for the next lesson

---

<sup>1</sup> Foxe's Book of Martyrs by John Foxe, 1570, pg 6

# *How to Read the Bible for All its Worth*

## Lesson 6e: Acts 9:32-12:25 – Opening the Door to the Gentiles

### **Chapter 8**

#### *What Other Acts Were Done By Agrippa Until His Death; And After What Manner He Died*

2. Now when Agrippa had reigned three years over all Judea, he came to the city Cesarea, which was formerly called Strato's Tower; and there he exhibited shows in honor of Caesar, upon his being informed that there was a certain festival celebrated to make vows for his safety. At which festival a great multitude was gotten together of the principal persons, and such as were of dignity through his province. On the second day of which shows he put on a garment made wholly of silver, and of a contexture truly wonderful, and came into the theater 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, and was so resplendent as to spread a horror over those that looked intently upon him; and presently his flatterers cried out, one from one place, and another from another, (though not for his good,) that he was a god; and they added, "Be thou merciful to us; for although we have hitherto revered thee only as a man, yet shall we henceforth own thee as superior to mortal nature." Upon this the king did neither rebuke them, nor reject their impious flattery. But as he presently afterward looked up, he saw an owl sitting on a certain rope over his head, and immediately understood that this bird was the messenger of ill tidings, as it had once been the messenger of good tidings to him; and fell into the deepest sorrow. A severe pain also arose in his belly, and began in a most violent manner. He therefore looked upon his friends, and said, "I, whom you call a god, am commanded presently to depart this life; while Providence thus reproves the lying words you just now said to me; and I, who was by you called immortal, am immediately to be hurried away by death. But I am bound to accept of what Providence allots, as it pleases God; for we have by no means lived ill, but in a splendid and happy manner." When he said this, his pain was become violent. Accordingly he was carried into the palace, and the rumor went abroad every where, that he would certainly die in a little time. But the multitude presently sat in sackcloth, with their wives and children, after the law of their country, and besought God for the king's recovery. All places were also full of mourning and lamentation. Now the king rested in a high chamber, and as he saw them below lying prostrate on the ground, he could not himself forbear weeping. And when he had been quite worn out by the pain in his belly for five days, he departed this life, being in the fifty-fourth year of his age...",

(from Josephus: Antiquities of the Jews, PC Study Bible formatted electronic database Copyright © 2003 by Biblesoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)