

- A Study in Acts -

Chapter Eleven – Peter's Explanation – First Called Christians

ACTS 11:1-16:

Peter, having brought the Gospel for the very first time to an uncircumcised Gentile, is now going to have to defend this action to the Jews in Jerusalem. We must remember that up to this point, the Gospel of Jesus as the Christ of God, has come solely to Jews and or proselytes to the Jewish way. Although this was spoken of in the prophets of God, hundreds of years prior to it taking place (**Isaiah 42:1; 49:6; 56:1-8; Acts 13:46-48**), the Jews were mired in the traditions of Moses and circumcision, instead of faith in Christ Jesus our Lord. This caused them to still treat those of the Gentiles as lesser or unworthy until they would be circumcised.

As Peter returns to Jerusalem, the Gospel's salvation for the Gentiles takes a back seat to Peter going in among Gentiles.

Text #1:

Acts 11:1-3 “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 in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!””

As we mentioned in the introduction, the first eighteen verses of this chapter are dedicated to Peter's defense of going in among Cornelius and His household to preach the Gospel. One of the things that we sometimes forget is that this defense is not made to Jews at large, but to those who are now Christians.

Note: Verse, one establishes that they had heard that the word of God had been received by these Gentiles; yet **verses two and three** illustrate that these Christians of the circumcision were concerned more that Peter had eaten with them (gone into their home).

Contended with Them: This is best described as, “**disputed with**”, “**reproved him**”, or “**charged him with being at fault**”.

As a side note, this is one of several circumstances which show that these early Christians did not regard Peter as having any particular supremacy over the Body of Christ, or as being in any particular sense a vicar of the Lord on earth.

Uncircumcised: Just to be clear, the Gentiles were not circumcised, and it was unlawful for a Jew to have close relations with Gentiles (eat and or sleep with them, etc.).

These verses will set up Peter's defense of these actions in such a way as the circumcision will see the hand and power of God, and come to a universal acceptance. Here is a quick outline of the coming defense:

Vision from God – Vs. 5-11

Spirit of God told him to go – Vs. 12

He took witnesses – Vs. 12

Peter had words for Cornelius and his household for their salvation – Vs. 13-14

The Spirit of God demonstrated God's approval of these events – Vs. 15-16

The result – Vs. 17-18

Text #2:

Acts 11:4-11 “But Peter explained *it* to them in order from the beginning, saying: ⁵“I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, an object descending like a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came to me. ⁶When I observed it intently and considered, I saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. ⁷And I heard a voice saying to me, ‘Rise, Peter; kill and eat.’ ⁸But I said, ‘Not so, Lord! For nothing common or unclean has at any time entered my mouth.’ ⁹But the voice answered me again from heaven, ‘What God has cleansed you must not call common.’ ¹⁰Now this was done three times, and all were drawn up again into heaven. ¹¹At that very moment, three men stood before the house where I was, having been sent to me from Caesarea.”

Here, Peter is going to begin and move through these events in order from the beginning. I am not going to cover these in detail, as we spent a great deal of time on them in the previous chapter; here instead is a quick outline:

He saw a vision from God.

The Spirit of God told him to go with the Gentiles without any discrimination.

Peter went, but took with him six Jews as witness.

An angel had appeared to Cornelius and told him to send for Peter who was to tell him words whereby he could be saved.

I do want to make sure we once again emphasize that no matter what transpires in the book of Acts; whereby sinner and preacher are brought together by super-natural means, or whereby God demonstrates His approval of events, it is always the words of the Gospel that reveal to men what they need to do to be saved!

Text #3:

Acts 11:12 “Then the Spirit told me to go with them, doubting nothing. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered the man’s house.”

Peter also makes it clear that the Spirit of God commanded him to go; “**doubting nothing**”.

In addition, as Peter had been well trained in the Law of Moses, he knew that the best way to establish these actions and all the evidence was by several witnesses. It was a valid practice under the Law of Moses, and Peter employs it well here.

Numbers 35:30 “Whoever kills a person, the murderer shall be put to death on the testimony of witnesses; but one witness is not *sufficient* testimony against a person for the death *penalty*.”

Deuteronomy 17:6-7 “Whoever is deserving of death shall be put to death on the testimony of two or three witnesses; he shall not be put to death on the testimony of one witness. ⁷ The hands of the witnesses shall be the first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hands of all the people. So you shall put away the evil from among you.”

Deuteronomy 19:15 “One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established.”

Hebrews 10:28 “Anyone who has rejected Moses’ law dies without mercy on *the testimony of two or three witnesses*.”

Text #4:

Acts 11:13-14 “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 now reveals that while God was working with him to go to Cornelius, He was also working on Cornelius’ end to bring them together.

The purpose of the gathering was specific to hear “**words by which Cornelius and all his household will be saved**”. Remember, this is what Cornelius stated was the purpose they were gathered to Peter for – **10:33**.

Text #5:

Acts 11:15-16 “And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning. 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.’”

Remember, that “**as I began to speak**”, was clearly after he had given the body of his sermon (**10:34-43**), but before he could conclude the lesson on what they needed to do to be saved. Therefore, the Spirit coming upon them did not act towards there salvation; we know that this demonstration was for the witnesses to completely understand that God had approved this occasion.

We also know without equivocation that baptism in the name of Jesus Christ, which is water baptism, is necessary for salvation to begin its process. This is going to be the baptism which will be commanded in words that would lead them to salvation (**10:47-48**).