FIVE-DAY THEOLOGY COURSE

ACTS

The Spirit of God in Mission

TAUGHT BY

Lec SK. KIERU

Chapter 7: The Inclusion of the Gentiles

A divine appointment, Peter goes to the Gentiles, Peter's Spirit-inspired message, the Caesarean outpouring, the opening of the door, and the strengthening and expansion of the church

Day 1: Understanding Acts and Preparing for Pentecost · Day 2: The Spirit-Empowered Church in Jerusalem and Beyond · Day 3: The Gentile Mission and Paul's Missionary Expansion · Day 4: Paul's Missionary Journeys, Jerusalem and Rome

Day 5: Final examination (2026-10-09)

Based on Acts: The Spirit of God in Mission by Denzil R. Miller. Africa's Hope, 2017.

CHAPTER 7 · UNIT 3 · DAY 2

The Inclusion of the Gentiles

A divine appointment, Peter goes to the Gentiles, Peter's Spirit-inspired message, the Caesarean outpouring, the opening of the door, and the strengthening and expansion of the church

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Source: Acts: The Spirit of God in Mission - Denzil R. Miller (Based on Chapter 7)

Chapter purpose. This chapter studies the Caesarean outpouring, the third and final key outpouring of the transitional period, which opened the door wide to Gentile inclusion into the body of Christ and to full Gentile participation in the mission of God.

Chapter 6 covered Saul's conversion, commissioning and empowering, and Peter's Spirit-empowered ministry in Judea. Chapter 7 stays inside the transitional period and takes up the third key outpouring of that period, the Caesarean outpouring, after the Samaritan and Damascene outpourings already examined.

Bible reading: Acts 10:1-12:25

Read the whole assignment before the lesson. The chapter then asks you to review a shorter passage before each of its six parts: Acts 10:1-26, Acts 10:27-33, Acts 10:34-43, Acts 10:44-48, Acts 11:1-18, and Acts 11:19-12:25.

Learning Objectives

• Explain the meaning of the vision that the Spirit gave to Peter on the rooftop.

• Explain why it is important to understand that Jesus ministered in the power and anointing of the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:38), and what this implies for ministry today.

• State how the Jewish brothers who accompanied Peter to Caesarea knew that the Gentiles had received the Holy Spirit.

• Show from Acts 1:8 and 11:15-17 that the Gentiles in Caesarea were given the Holy Spirit to empower them as witnesses.

• Explain when evangelism becomes missions, and how a church can become a

missional church.

Before This Lesson, Read Your Bible

Acts 10:1-12:25

Before beginning this chapter, read Acts 10:1-12:25. Keep your Bible open through the lesson, since the chapter reviews a shorter passage before each of its six parts.

The Big Idea

The Caesarean outpouring opened the door wide to Gentile inclusion into the body of Christ.

Where We Are in Acts

A Commission, a Command, and a Promise

• Before Jesus returned to heaven, He left His church with a commission, a command, and a promise.

• He commissioned His followers to be His witnesses in all the earth. Today we call this commission the Great Commission. It is found in all four Gospels and Acts (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-18; Luke 24:46-49; John 20:21-22; Acts 1:8).

• He commanded His disciples to stay in Jerusalem until they had been clothed with power from heaven (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-5).

• He promised them that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them, thus enabling them to be effective witnesses for Him in all the earth (Acts 1:8).

• The disciples obeyed His command, received His promise, and immediately began to fulfill His commission.

From the Jewish Mission to the Transitional Period

• Jesus' promise of power was first fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost when Christ poured out the Spirit on His disciples, empowering them to be His witnesses (2:1-4).

• A few weeks later God poured out His Spirit a second time in Jerusalem, again empowering the church for its missionary task (4:31).

• These two outpourings enabled the church to fulfill the first part of Jesus' mandate, to be His witnesses in Jerusalem (1:8). We call this witness in Jerusalem the Jewish mission.

• Christ's desire for His church was that it be an omni-ethnic international community of believers. Before this could happen, however, it needed to be prepared for its mission to the nations.

• This preparation came through a series of providential events and key outpourings of the Holy Spirit. We call this period in Acts the transitional period.

• The providential events already examined include the persecution and scattering of the Jerusalem believers.

• Two key outpourings already examined took place during this same period: the Samaritan outpouring and the Damascene outpouring. These helped to prepare the church for its coming Gentile mission.

This Chapter: A Third Key Outpouring

• In this chapter we examine a third key outpouring of the Spirit that took place during the transitional period, the Caesarean outpouring (see Table 2.1).

• This outpouring of the Holy Spirit opened the door wide to Gentile inclusion into the body of Christ.

• It further opened the door to full Gentile participation in the mission of God.

• It all began with God supernaturally arranging an appointment between a Gentile soldier and a Jewish apostle.

The Three Outpourings of the Transitional Period

The transitional period prepared the church for its mission to the nations through providential events and three key outpourings of the Spirit. The chapter points the reader back to Table 2.1 for the full list of seven key outpourings.

Order in the transitional period · Outpouring · What the chapter says about it

• Order in the transitional period: First. Outpouring: The Samaritan outpouring. What the chapter says about it: Already examined. It helped to prepare the church for its coming Gentile mission.

• Order in the transitional period: Second. Outpouring: The Damascene outpouring. What the chapter says about it: Already examined. It helped to prepare the church for its coming Gentile mission.

• Order in the transitional period: Third and final. Outpouring: The Caesarean outpouring. What the chapter says about it: The fifth of seven key outpourings of the Spirit in Acts. It opened the door wide to Gentile inclusion into the body of Christ, and opened the door to full Gentile participation in the mission of God.

The Story: A Divine Appointment (Acts 10:1-26)

A God-fearing Gentile man by the name of Cornelius lived with his family in the city of Caesarea. He was a Roman centurion of the Italian Regiment. He prayed often and gave generously to the poor. One day an angel of God appeared to him in a vision. The angel informed him that God had taken note of his prayers and gifts to the poor. He told Cornelius to send men to Joppa and bring back a man named Simon Peter. In obedience Cornelius sent three men to Joppa to get Peter, who was staying in the home of Simon the tanner.

The next day, as the men were approaching Joppa, Peter went up on the roof to pray. There he fell into a trance and saw a vision. In the vision heaven opened, and a large sheet was let down by four corners. It was filled with all sorts of unclean animals, reptiles, and birds. A voice commanded Peter to "kill and eat." Peter refused, saying, "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean." The voice challenged him, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." This scene was repeated three times, and the sheet was taken back to heaven.

As Peter pondered these things, the three men from Caesarea arrived at the door to Simon's house. The Spirit then spoke to Peter, telling him that three men were looking for him and that he should not hesitate to go with them, for God had sent them.

The men told Peter the story of Cornelius and of his sending them to bring Peter to Caesarea. The next day Peter took six Jewish brothers with him and went with the three men to Caesarea. When they arrived at the house of Cornelius the following day, they found that Cornelius had called together a large number of his relatives and close friends, who were ready to hear what Peter had to say.

Commentary on Acts 10:1-26

God Set Up the Meeting

• The meeting of Peter and Cornelius is another example of what has been called a "divine appointment." God set up the meeting between Peter and Cornelius.

• God had a great purpose and plan for this meeting. His purpose was to show that His kingdom was open to all who would seek Him, whether Jew or Gentile.

• It was also to demonstrate that any people of any nation can become full participants in His mission if they will be filled with His Spirit.

• His plan was to bring a group of Palestinian Jewish believers together with a group of Roman Gentiles and then move powerfully by His Spirit upon them all.

• In this story we again see the Holy Spirit acting as Superintendent of the Harvest. It is He who is directing the work of missions.

10:1 Caesarea

• Caesarea was an important seaport city built by Herod the Great between 25 and 13 B.C.

• It was located about fifty miles (eighty kilometers) northwest of Jerusalem and served as the residence of the Roman procurator of Palestine.

• Caesarea had a mixed Jewish and Gentile population.

10:1 A man named Cornelius

• Along with Peter, Cornelius is the chief player in this story.

• Luke describes him as a God-fearer, that is, a Gentile who sincerely sought to serve and follow the God of Israel.

• He was a prayerful man, godly, generous, and deeply reverent.

• Still, to the Jewish mind he remained an unclean Gentile.

• Even more, he was a Roman soldier, and thus a living symbol of Gentile oppression over the Jews.

10:3 A vision

• An angel of God appeared to Cornelius in a vision. The Spirit moved on this yet-to-be-converted man, directing him to the truth.

• One work of the Holy Spirit is to point men to the truth (John 6:44; 16:8-11).

• Many ex-Muslims can testify today of how Christ appeared to them in a vision, beginning their quest for Him.

10:9 Peter went up on the roof to pray

• Cornelius and Peter are both noted for their prayer in this story (vv. 2, 4, 9, 30-31; 11:5).

• Prayer is a central prerequisite for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. (Concerning the relationship of prayer to receiving the Holy Spirit, see comments on 1:14.)

10:10 He fell into a trance

• Peter's falling into a trance was an act of the Holy Spirit. It was while he was in this state that the Lord gave him a vision.

• Believers should not seek after visions; however, when they come, they should welcome and cherish them.

10:15 Do not call anything impure that God has made clean

• God was teaching Peter that Jewish Christians should no longer consider Gentiles as impure or unclean. Christ died for them just as He died for the Jews.

• Neither should Gentiles be required to become Jewish proselytes before becoming Christians.

• Because of what Christ has done, they have the same right as the Jews to approach God for salvation and blessing.

• This represents a major shift in thinking for the Jewish Christians. It opened the door for Gentile inclusion in the blessing of Abraham (Genesis 22:18; compare Galatians 3:16).

10:19 The Spirit said to him

• Because Peter had been filled with the Spirit (2:4) and he remained full of the Spirit through prayer (2:42; 3:1; 6:4) and repeated fillings of the Spirit (4:8, 31), he was able to hear and clearly discern the voice of the Spirit.

The Story: Peter Goes to the Gentiles (Acts 10:27-33)

When Peter and his companions entered Cornelius' house, they found a large

gathering of people ready to hear what Peter had to say. After expressing his misgivings about entering into a Gentile home, Peter assured the residents that "God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean." He then asked them why they had sent for him.

Cornelius told Peter of his vision and how an angel had told him to send for him. He concluded, "Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us."

Commentary on Acts 10:27-33

10:28 God has shown me

• Peter's newfound understanding of God's ways did not come to him by intellectual endeavor, but by a direct action of the Holy Spirit.

• What the Holy Spirit showed him, however, was nothing new. It was what the Scriptures had taught from the beginning: that God is the God of all creation and that He loves all nations and wants them all to know and serve Him (Genesis 12:3; Psalms 2:8).

10:33 We are all here in the presence of God

• Cornelius understood that when people prayerfully gather in the Lord's name, He joins them (Matthew 18:20).

• God's presence is manifested when His people pray and call upon His name. In such an atmosphere the Holy Spirit is easily received.

The Story: Peter's Spirit-Inspired Message (Acts 10:34-43)

Peter began his message to Cornelius' household with an admission: "I now realize," he said, "how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear Him and do what is right." He then launched into a recital of the gospel message, declaring that Jesus is Lord of all. He told how God had anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit and power, and how He had gone about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil.

Peter then addressed the theme of Spirit-empowered witness, stating that God had raised up the apostles to be witnesses of all that Jesus did. They testified about

Him and how He was crucified, and how God had raised Him from the dead. After His resurrection, Jesus was not seen by everyone, but by witnesses whom God chose.

He sent those same witnesses to testify that Jesus is the One whom God has appointed as the Judge of all people. Not only that, but the prophets also bore witness to Christ, saying that everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.

Commentary on Acts 10:34-43

Three Major Themes in Peter's Sermon

While presenting the actual words and essence of Peter's sermon to the household of Cornelius, Luke carefully constructed the sermon to help his readers understand exactly what was taking place on that day and what God was trying to accomplish.

• First, Peter's newfound realization that he should call no man common or unclean. This represented a radical shift in Peter's thinking concerning the Gentiles. It was also a direct challenge to the Judaizers within the Jerusalem church. It was absolutely essential that this shift in thinking take place if the church was to become all that Jesus intended it to be.

• Second, the gospel, the message of Christ. This message was the core of all apostolic witness. Peter declared that Jesus was the Messiah and Lord of all. He spoke of His death, His resurrection, and His post-resurrection appearances (compare 1 Corinthians 15:1-8).

• Third and most developed, Spirit-anointed vocational witness. Peter told of how Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit to perform His ministry. The same was true of the apostles, who were eyewitnesses of everything Jesus did, including His death and resurrection, and who saw Him alive after His resurrection.

• He commanded them to preach and testify to the people that He was the Judge of the living and the dead. Finally, the prophets testified about God's universal salvation for all who would believe.

• This witness theme is important, for it sets the stage for the outpouring of the Spirit about to take place.

10:34 I now realize... that God does not show favoritism

• Peter repeated the lesson he learned on the rooftop in Joppa.

• Before the gospel could advance beyond parochial Judaism, the church had to come to the understanding that God accepts people from every nation who will fear Him and do what is right.

10:36 Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all

• Jesus is not only the promised Jewish Messiah, He is Lord (Greek Kurios) over all peoples and nations.

• Jesus is referred to as "Lord" nearly one hundred times in Acts.

• The title identifies Him both as deity and supreme ruler in God's kingdom.

10:38 God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power... God was with him

• Although Jesus was truly God, in His incarnation He emptied himself of the use of His divine attributes and ministered as a man full of the Holy Spirit (compare Philippians 2:6-7).

• Jesus' ministry was thus performed not in His own power as the second person of the Trinity, but in the power of the Holy Spirit.

• This is a key theme in the Gospel of Luke, beginning with Jesus' announcement that "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor" (4:18; compare 3:21-23), and continuing throughout His ministry (4:1, 14; 5:15; 9:1; 11:20; 24:45, 49; Acts 1:2).

• It is for this reason that Jesus could say to His disciples that they would be able to do the same, and even greater, works than He (John 14:12). It is because they would be anointed by the same Spirit who anointed Him.

10:39 We are witnesses

• Spirit-anointed vocational witness is the major theme in Peter's sermon to Cornelius' household and is a major theme in Acts.

• The word "witness" is used twice in this passage (vv. 39, 41) and implied two other times, using the cognate word "testify" (vv. 42-43).

• Witness first appears in 1:8 where Jesus tells His disciples that they will be His

"witnesses... to the ends of the earth." (See comments on 2:32.)

10:39-40 They killed him..., but God raised him from the dead

• The central core of the gospel message is the vicarious death and glorious resurrection of Christ. (Compare 1 Corinthians 15:1-8. See the comments on 1:3.)

The Story: The Holy Spirit Is Poured Out on Gentiles (Acts 10:44-48)

Before Peter had finished his message, the Holy Spirit came powerfully upon all who were listening. The Jews who accompanied Peter to Caesarea were amazed that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. They knew it was so because they heard them speaking in tongues and magnifying God.

Peter then called for these new believers to be baptized in water, saying, "They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have." After this he stayed with Cornelius and his companions for a few days.

Commentary on Acts 10:44-48

Again the Holy Spirit Is Poured Out

• The Caesarean outpouring is the fifth of seven key outpourings of the Spirit in Acts.

• It is also the third and final outpouring during the transitional period.

• This outpouring opened wide the door for the upcoming Gentile mission (see Table 2.1).

• The purpose of the Caesarean outpouring was the same as for every other outpouring of the Spirit in Acts: to empower the church for missional witness (compare 1:8; 10:46; 11:15).

10:44 While Peter was still speaking these words

• The "words" Luke is referring to are Peter's words concerning Spirit-empowered vocational witness (vv. 38-43).

• It was at that precise moment in Peter's sermon that the Holy Spirit fell on all those who were present.

• This "divine coincidence" helps us to understand the reason the Holy Spirit was given on this occasion.

• The Spirit was given so that the Gentile household of Cornelius could be empowered for vocational witness, just as Christ himself had been (v. 38).

10:44 The Holy Spirit came on all

• Empowerment for mission is an experience for all Christians.

• The word "all" often occurs in Scripture in relation to people's experiencing the Spirit.

• Moses wished "that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!" (Numbers 11:29).

• Joel prophesied of a time when God would pour out His Spirit on "all people" (Joel 2:28).

• On the Day of Pentecost "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:4).

• On that same occasion Peter announced that the gift of the Holy Spirit was "for all who are far off, for all whom the Lord our God will call" (Acts 2:39).

• Now, here at the household of Cornelius, "the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message."

10:45 The gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles

• Joel had prophesied that God would pour out His Spirit on all peoples.

• God continued to fulfill that promise by giving the Spirit to uncircumcised Gentiles.

10:46 For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God

• The Greek word translated "for" (gar) in this verse is often translated "because."

• The Jewish brethren knew that the Gentiles had received the Holy Spirit because they heard them speak in tongues and magnify God.

• Speaking in tongues and prophetic witness thus serve as evidence that one has received the Holy Spirit.

• This is the second instance in Acts where tongues are specifically mentioned as occurring immediately upon one's receiving the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4).

• Tongues are again specifically mentioned in Acts 19, when the Ephesian disciples receive the Spirit (v. 6).

• In the two other instances in Acts of individuals initially receiving the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues is consistent with the data (8:17-18; compare 9:17-18 with 1 Corinthians 14:18).

• The NIV translates megaluno as "praising," but better translations are "magnify" (NKJV) or "exalting" (NASB).

• These newly Spirit-baptized Gentiles were likely exalting God by declaring His mighty works to others, as did the 120 disciples and Peter at Pentecost (2:11, 14ff.), rather than by praising Him as the NIV indicates.

• The Caesarean outpouring is another example of Luke's empowerment-witness motif first introduced in 1:8.

10:47 They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have

• The Gentiles in Caesarea received the Spirit just as the 120 Jews in Jerusalem at Pentecost, and for the same purpose: Spirit-empowered witness.

The Story: The Door Is Opened (Acts 11:1-18)

Soon the news of what had happened at Caesarea spread throughout all Judea. Everyone was saying that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. Some Jewish believers, however, were not happy about what Peter had done. When Peter returned to Jerusalem, they began to criticize him, charging him with the offense of going into the house of uncircumcised Gentiles and eating with them.

Peter defended his actions by explaining exactly what had happened to him, including his vision and the Spirit's injunction to him: "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." He further told these Jewish believers how the Spirit had spoken to him and told him to have no hesitation about going to Caesarea. Peter then told them about Cornelius' vision and how he had sent for him to bring them a message from God. The message would show them how they could be saved.

Peter finally told them of how the Holy Spirit fell on the Gentiles, noting that He "came on them as He had come on us at the beginning." Peter was then reminded of the final speech of Jesus, how He had said to His disciples, "John baptized with

water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." He concluded, "If God gave them the same gift as He gave us... who was I to think that I could oppose God?"

When the assembly heard this, they held their peace and confessed that "God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life."

Commentary on Acts 11:1-18

A Pivotal Moment in the History of the Church

• The outpouring of the Spirit on the Gentiles in Caesarea was a pivotal moment in the history of the church.

• On that occasion God gave to those Gentile seekers two dynamic, almost simultaneous experiences. First, He granted to them "repentance unto life" (Acts 11:18).

• He then almost immediately empowered them for witness by pouring out the Holy Spirit on them, just as He had done with the 120 "at the beginning" (v. 15).

• God was indeed pouring the new wine of the Spirit into the old wineskins of Jewish religious tradition, and the old wineskins could not contain it.

• God thus used the Caesarean outpouring to help prepare the church for its mission to "the ends of the earth" as Jesus had outlined in 1:8.

Witness in Two Directions

• This outpouring is yet another key example of Luke's empowerment-witness motif in Acts. The Caesarean outpouring resulted in powerful witness in two directions.

• First, it resulted in witness to the inhabitants of Caesarea. It did this through immediate prophetic proclamation of the gospel (see notes on 10:46) and by creating a new center of Spirit-empowered witness in an important Roman seaport (Acts 18:22; 21:8, 16).

• Second, the Caesarean outpouring witnessed back to the church in Jerusalem. It said to the Jewish Christians there that they should not place unnecessary requirements on Gentiles, other than faith and repentance, before they could become Christians.

• Uncircumcised Gentiles should be allowed into the church not only as

full-fledged members but also as full participants in God's mission.

11:12 The Spirit told me

• When explaining his actions to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem, Peter answered that the Spirit had spoken to him, directing him to do what he did.

• Again, the Spirit was actively involved in directing and fulfilling the mission of Christ.

• Because Peter was open and obedient to the voice of the Spirit, God was able to use him.

11:15 The Holy Spirit came on them

• This phrase reminds us of Jesus' promise in 1:8: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you."

• Luke's use of the same terminology in both instances helps us to understand how we are to interpret the Caesarean outpouring.

• Here at Caesarea God was fulfilling His promise of Acts 1:8 that He would empower believers for missional witness when the Holy Spirit "came upon" them.

• Peter further testified that the Holy Spirit came upon the Caesareans "as... on us at the beginning." They received the Spirit in the same way and for the same purpose as the disciples at Pentecost, empowerment for witness.

11:16 You will be baptized with the Holy Spirit

• When the Spirit fell on the Caesareans, Peter remembered these words of Jesus spoken just before His ascension into heaven (1:4-8).

• They were spoken in the context of Jesus' preparing His disciples for the Day of Pentecost, when they would be empowered by the Spirit to take the gospel to all nations (v. 8).

• The implication is again clear: the Caesareans' baptism in the Holy Spirit was for the same purpose as the believers at Pentecost, empowerment for mission.

11:17 God gave them the same gift as he gave us

• God gave the new Caesarean believers the same gift (the baptism in the Holy Spirit) for the same purpose (empowerment for witness) as He gave to the apostles and other believers on the Day of Pentecost.

• Today the Lord still baptizes believers in the Holy Spirit for the same purpose.

11:18 So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life

• Peter's reasoning is seamless.

• If God has empowered Gentiles to be His witnesses to the nations and He has given them the same divine evidence as He gave to the 120 at Pentecost (speaking in tongues), then it cannot be denied that He must have first granted them repentance leading to eternal life.

The Story: The Church Strengthens and Expands (Acts 11:19-12:25)

The Gospel Reaches Antioch

Luke now takes his readers back to the scattering of the Jewish believers in Acts 8. He tells how some of those who were scattered by the persecution traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, Cyrene, and Syrian Antioch. Those who first arrived in Antioch preached the gospel to fellow Jews only. Some, however, who came to Antioch by way of Cyprus and Cyrene, preached the gospel to the Greeks (non-Jews) also. The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people turned to the Lord.

When news of what was happening in Antioch reached the church leaders in Jerusalem, they sent Barnabas to check on the work. Barnabas was full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and when he arrived in Antioch, he was glad when he saw "evidence of the grace of God." He encouraged the disciples there to remain true to the Lord. As a result of his ministry, many people came to Christ.

Barnabas then went to Tarsus, where he found Saul. He brought him back to Antioch, where he and Saul worked together teaching many people. It was after a year of such teaching that the disciples in Antioch first came to be known as Christians.

About that time a group of prophets came down from Jerusalem. One of their number, Agabus by name, prophesied through the Spirit that a great famine was coming. In response to this prophecy, the disciples in Antioch decided to help their brothers living in Judea by sending a gift to them by Barnabas and Saul.

Herod, Prison, and Deliverance

Soon after this, Herod, the political ruler of the area, began persecuting the church in Jerusalem by arresting Christians. He killed James and then seized Peter and put him into prison to be held for trial. When the church heard what happened, it began to intercede for his release.

The night before Peter's trial, an angel of the Lord appeared in his cell, awoke him, and told him to get up. As he did, the chains fell from his wrists. The angel then led him out of the prison. Dazed, Peter thought he had seen a vision. When he finally came to himself, he understood that the Lord had sent His angel to deliver him. He then went to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where a large group of believers had gathered to pray for him. At first the believers did not believe that it was actually Peter, but when they finally recognized him, they were astonished.

The next morning confusion filled the prison. No one knew what had happened to Peter. In anger, Herod had the guards executed. He later went to Caesarea. Because he refused to acknowledge God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died.

Even in the midst of such persecution, "the word of God continued to increase and spread." When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission of delivering the relief money from the saints in Antioch to those in Jerusalem, they returned to Antioch, taking with them John Mark.

Commentary: Missionary Witness in Antioch (Acts 11:19-30)

The Church Continues to Strengthen and Expand

• Seven years after Pentecost the church had spread throughout all Judea, Samaria, and Galilee; southward into Gaza and North Africa; westward into Cyprus in the Mediterranean Sea; and northward into Phoenicia, Syria, and Cilicia.

• It had also likely spread to many places not mentioned in Acts.

• In the remainder of chapter 11 and in chapter 12, Luke told about the planting of the church in Antioch and of further developments affecting the church in Jerusalem.

When Does Evangelism Become Missions?

• Evangelism becomes missions when believers begin to minister across cultures. We see this happening in the church in Antioch.

• The first wave of Jewish Christians to arrive in Antioch told the message only to Jews. The second wave, however, preached the gospel to Greeks also.

• Although the first wave had traveled many miles from their home in Jerusalem and had crossed national borders, they were still doing evangelism because they were only reaching their own people.

• However, when the second wave began to reach out to those of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, they were doing missions!

• The church founded in Antioch was to become the second great center of Christian missions, after Jerusalem. It was from this church that Paul would launch his three missionary journeys. Luke therefore told us about the founding of this great church.

11:20 The good news about the Lord Jesus

• As in every other instance in Acts, wherever the believers went, their central message remained the good news about the Lord Jesus.

• This message must also remain the centerpiece of our preaching today, for only the message of Jesus is able to save people from their sins and give them eternal life (Acts 4:12; 16:31).

11:21 The Lord's hand was with them

• This is another way of saying that the manifest presence and power of the Holy Spirit accompanied them.

• In Scripture the Spirit is often pictured as the hand (or arm or finger) of the Lord (Ezekiel 3:14; 37:1; Luke 11:20; see also the comments on 4:30).

11:23 Evidence of the grace of God

• The evidence of the grace of God that Barnabas saw was the changed lives of the people who had become disciples of Jesus.

• We should expect this same evidence in our ministries today.

11:24 A good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith

• Barnabas is mentioned thirty times in Acts and five times in the Pauline epistles.

• Because of his generous nature, he earned the title "Son of Encouragement" (4:36). In the church in Antioch he lived up to his name, for there "he encouraged them all" (v. 23).

• Barnabas was also an apostle and traveling companion of Paul on Paul's first missionary journey (13:3-14:26).

• He was also a preacher (15:35), a teacher (11:26; 13:1; 15:35), a prophet (13:1), and a worker of miracles (14:3; 15:12).

• As a result of Barnabas' Spirit-filled ministry, many people came to know the Lord. Here Luke draws a direct relationship between the preacher's character, his being full of the Holy Spirit, his faith, and church growth.

11:26 The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch

• Note that it was disciples (that is, committed learners) who were called Christians (Greek Christianous) at Antioch.

• It was only after an entire year of intensive discipleship training that these disciples began to display the character of Christ to such an extent that they were called Christians.

11:28 Agabus... through the Spirit predicted... a severe famine

• Agabus was one of a group of prophets who came from Jerusalem to strengthen the work in Antioch (v. 27).

• This is the first of two times that this prophet is mentioned in Acts (21:10). He seemed to have had a special gift of predictive prophecy.

• Not all prophecy in Scripture, however, is predictive. Even with the Old Testament prophets, most of their ministry was not predicting the future but declaring the word of the Lord to their contemporary audiences.

• In the church the threefold purpose of prophecy is strengthening, encouraging, and comforting believers (1 Corinthians 14:3; see also the comments on 21:10).

Commentary: Persecution, Prayer, Deliverance, and Witness (Acts 12:1-25)

A Second Source of Persecution

• Persecution now came to the Jerusalem church from a second source.

• The first wave of persecution had come from the Jewish authorities. This wave came from Herod, the political ruler of the area.

• Persecution is a repeated theme in Acts. (For an explanation of the role of persecution in Acts, see comments on 8:1.)

12:5 The church was earnestly praying to God

• Again Luke emphasized the power of prayer and the central role that it played in the life of the early church.

• Throughout Acts, we see the believers constantly in prayer, both individually and corporately.

• Prayer is a powerful weapon at the disposal of the church.

12:24 The word of God continued to increase and spread

• In spite of constant harassment and even martyrdom, the church stayed focused on its mission and continued to proclaim the gospel.

Conclusion

• With the story of Peter's deliverance from prison, we come to the end of the second section of Acts, the transitional period.

• The church was now ready to launch its Gentile mission.

• It did this with a powerful move of the Holy Spirit in the church in Antioch. That move of the Spirit is discussed in the next chapter.

Important Terms

Divine appointment. A meeting that God himself arranges.

God-fearer. A Gentile who worshipped and followed the God of Israel.

Proselytes. Gentiles who converted to Judaism. Peter learned that Gentiles did not have to do this first.

Caesarean outpouring. The pouring out of the Holy Spirit on Cornelius' Gentile household in Caesarea.

Transitional period. The middle section of Acts, where God prepared the church

for its mission to the nations.

Missional witness. Witness that carries the gospel out to the nations.

Empowerment-witness motif. Luke's repeated pattern in Acts: the Spirit comes, power is given, witness follows.

Superintendent of the Harvest. The Holy Spirit as the one who directs the work of missions.

Key People

• Cornelius: A God-fearing Gentile who lived with his family in Caesarea. A Roman centurion of the Italian Regiment. Prayerful, godly, generous, and deeply reverent. Along with Peter, the chief player in this story.

• Peter: The Jewish apostle who received the rooftop vision in Joppa, preached to Cornelius' household, and later defended his actions before the believers in Jerusalem. He was also delivered from Herod's prison by an angel.

• Simon the tanner: The man in whose home Peter was staying in Joppa.

• The angel of God: Appeared to Cornelius in a vision and told him to send to Joppa for Simon Peter. Later an angel of the Lord freed Peter from prison and struck down Herod.

• The six Jewish brothers: The believers Peter took with him from Joppa to Caesarea. They were amazed that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles.

• Barnabas: Sent by the Jerusalem leaders to check on the work in Antioch. "A good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith." Called "Son of Encouragement" (4:36), and also a preacher, teacher, prophet, and worker of miracles.

• Saul: Found by Barnabas at Tarsus and brought to Antioch, where the two taught many people for a year. He and Barnabas carried the famine relief gift to Judea.

• Agabus: One of a group of prophets who came from Jerusalem to Antioch. He prophesied through the Spirit that a great famine was coming.

• Herod: The political ruler of the area. He persecuted the church in Jerusalem, killed James, and imprisoned Peter. Because he refused to acknowledge God, an angel of the Lord struck him down.

• Mary the mother of John Mark: A large group of believers gathered at her house to pray for Peter while he was in prison.

Key Places

• Caesarea: An important seaport city built by Herod the Great between 25 and 13 B.C., about fifty miles (eighty kilometers) northwest of Jerusalem. It served as the residence of the Roman procurator of Palestine and had a mixed Jewish and Gentile population.

• Joppa: Where Peter was staying in the home of Simon the tanner, and where he went up on the roof to pray and received the vision.

• Jerusalem: Where Peter returned and was criticized for going into the house of uncircumcised Gentiles, and where the assembly confessed that God had granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life.

• Antioch (Syrian Antioch): Where the gospel was preached to Greeks as well as Jews, where the disciples were first called Christians, and which became the second great center of Christian missions after Jerusalem.

• Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Cyrene: Places reached by believers scattered by the persecution of Acts 8. Some who came from Cyprus and Cyrene preached to the Greeks in Antioch.

• Tarsus: Where Barnabas went to find Saul before bringing him to Antioch.

Key Event

The Caesarean outpouring (Acts 10:44-48). While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit came powerfully upon all who were listening in the house of Cornelius, and they spoke in tongues and magnified God.

This is the fifth of seven key outpourings of the Spirit in Acts and the third and final outpouring during the transitional period. Its purpose was the same as every other outpouring in Acts: to empower the church for missional witness. It opened the door wide to Gentile inclusion into the body of Christ and to full Gentile participation in the mission of God.

Key Verse

"They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have."

Acts 10:47

Remember This

• The Caesarean outpouring opened the door wide to Gentile inclusion into the body of Christ.

• Any people can become full participants in God's mission if they will be filled with the Spirit.

• This witness theme is important. It sets the stage for the outpouring of the Spirit about to take place.

• "They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have."

• We must ensure that those who receive the gospel are immediately empowered by the Spirit.

• Evangelism becomes missions when believers begin to minister across cultures.

• Missional churches minister to different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

Life Application: A Divine Appointment

• We should not consider anyone unworthy of hearing and responding to the message of Christ.

• We should gladly carry the gospel to all people. When we do, we can expect the Holy Spirit to guide us.

• When such guidance comes, we can be sure that the Spirit is working on both ends of the situation. Not only does He guide us into witnessing, He also prepares the hearts of the ones He is directing us to.

• If we, like Peter, will be filled with the Spirit and remain prayerful, we too can expect the Lord to speak to us and to guide us.

Life Application: Peter Goes to the Gentiles

• We should not hesitate to follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit, even when He leads us into unfamiliar and uncomfortable situations.

• When we do follow His leading, we can be assured that His presence will go

with us.

Life Application: Peter's Spirit-Inspired Message

• If Jesus ministered in the power of the Spirit, then we too must seek to minister in that same power.

• Just as He was anointed by the Spirit (Luke 3:21-22 with 4:18-19), we too must be anointed by the Spirit.

• This anointing comes as a result of one's being baptized in the Holy Spirit as were the 120 on the Day of Pentecost and as were the Gentile seekers in Caesarea.

• The anointing remains as we daily live and walk in the Spirit.

• We must keep the message of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection at the center of all our preaching and teaching.

Life Application: The Holy Spirit Is Poured Out on Gentiles

• We, too, can expect to receive the Holy Spirit today just as He was received by these Gentile believers in Caesarea and just as the disciples did on the Day of Pentecost.

• When we receive the Holy Spirit, we can expect the same results: we will speak in tongues and receive power to be effective witnesses for Him.

Life Application: The Door Is Opened

• As we minister for Christ, we should expect the same divine guidance that the Spirit gave to Peter and other New Testament believers. We can trust Him to guide us in the way.

• When He does give us direction, we should be willing to go without hesitation to any place or to any people wherever He directs.

• As we go, we should bear in mind that not only will God use us to spread His Word, but He will also use those to whom we take the gospel.

• It is therefore essential that we ensure that those who receive the gospel are immediately empowered by the Spirit to take the gospel to others.

Life Application: The Church Strengthens and Expands

• If we are to have truly missional churches, we must gladly minister to people of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

• We cannot allow people of different tribes and religions who live in our neighborhoods to go unevangelized. We must find ways to reach them with the gospel.

• In this way we can be true missionaries, without even leaving our own home towns.

• It is important that we ensure that the Lord's hand is with us as we minister. We must have the Spirit's presence and power in us.

• Just as Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, we should also seek to live holy lives, be filled with the Spirit, and act in faith in all that we do for Christ.

• When we face difficulties in fulfilling the Great Commission, we should turn to God in earnest prayer. Through prayer we can tap into the miracle-working power of God.

• It is also through prayer that we receive strength and guidance for the work ahead.

• If we will seek God's face and remain focused on His mission, we too can expect to see the word of God continue to increase and spread wherever we are ministering.

Textbook Review and Application

• 1. What was the meaning of the vision that the Spirit gave to Peter on the rooftop?

• 2. Why is it important to understand that Jesus ministered in the power and anointing of the Holy Spirit? (Acts 10:38). What are the implications for our ministries today?

• 3. How did the Jewish brothers who accompanied Peter to Caesarea know that the Gentiles had received the Holy Spirit?

• 4. According to Acts 1:8 and 11:15-17, how do we know that the Gentiles in Caesarea were given the Holy Spirit to empower them as witnesses?

• 5. How can your church become a missional church?

Quick Review

1. Who was Cornelius?

Answer: A God-fearing Gentile living in Caesarea, a Roman centurion of the Italian Regiment, who prayed often and gave generously to the poor.

2. Where was Peter staying when he received his vision, and in whose house?

Answer: In Joppa, in the home of Simon the tanner.

3. What did the voice tell Peter in the vision?

Answer: "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." God was teaching him that Jewish Christians should no longer consider Gentiles impure or unclean.

4. Where does the Caesarean outpouring stand among the key outpourings in Acts?

Answer: It is the fifth of the seven key outpourings, and the third and final outpouring during the transitional period.

5. When does evangelism become missions?

Answer: Evangelism becomes missions when believers begin to minister across cultures.

Chapter Summary

The Caesarean outpouring opened the door wide to Gentile inclusion into the body of Christ, and to full Gentile participation in the mission of God.

• God arranged a divine appointment between Cornelius, a Gentile soldier, and Peter, a Jewish apostle, and taught Peter not to call anything impure that God has made clean.

• While Peter was still speaking about Spirit-empowered witness, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message, and the Jewish brothers knew it because they heard them speaking in tongues and magnifying God.

• Peter's report in Jerusalem settled the matter: God gave the Gentiles the same gift for the same purpose, so the church confessed that God had granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life.

Carry the gospel to people of every ethnic and cultural background, and make sure those who receive it are immediately empowered by the Spirit to take it to others.

ONE-SENTENCE MEMORY

God arranged an appointment between a Gentile soldier and a Jewish apostle, poured out His Spirit on the Gentiles in Caesarea, and so opened the door to full Gentile participation in the mission of God.