

The Book of Acts: Verse-by-Verse

Study Notes: Acts 11:1-18

- **“The Apostles And The Gentile Report” v. 1**

“The apostles and the brothers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God Peter went up to Jerusalem...”

Peter’s visit to Cornelius and his return to Jerusalem were not in short order. There was some time between them.

Eastern And Western Texts:

Eastern or Alexandrian manuscripts are variable and focus on the historical message.

Western or Bezan manuscripts tend to display a high degree of linguistic conformity and focus on historical accuracy.

Western text indicates that Peter spent some time in Caesarea before returning to Jerusalem. The scribal addition is meant to show that Peter wasn’t “recalled” to Jerusalem by the other apostles.

Why was it important for the Western scribe to include this additional information? Scholars suggest that he wanted to preclude any impression that the events at Maritima were immediately followed by a large-scale controversy.

- **“The Gentiles also had received the word of God.”**

Luke’s language is a throwback to Philip’s efforts at Samaria: “When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them.” The consistent idea: The

Gentiles had “received the Word of God” just as the Samaritans had “accepted the Word of God.”

A second similarity: The Jerusalem leadership had sent Peter and John to confirm the Samaritans’ salvation. The same council looked for Peter to report happened at Caesarea Maritima.

- **The “Unavoidable” Controversy: vv. 2-3**

“So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him and said, “You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.”

Luke seems to indicate that, “those who were of the circumcision” represents a faction within the (Messianic-Jewish) Jerusalem Church.

This group was particularly tied to the Jewish Law and continued to insist that Jews could have no social interactions with Gentiles.

At the council, were the six men from the “circumcision” those who criticized Peter, or was it others? It would have been disheartening for Peter if the same men who had gone with him were now opposing him at the council proceedings.

- **Peter’s Explanation: v. 4-7**

Peter’s account does not perfectly match Luke’s account: The precise chronology and wording differs. This allows us to hear Peter’s own observations and interpretation of those events.

“Peter began and explained everything to them precisely as it had happened.”

Peter obviously knew that this was a highly unusual event which had recently occurred. He was endeavoring to ensure that none of the pertinent facts were lost.

- **The Strange Vision: vv.5-7**

“I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. I saw something like a large sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to where I was. 6 I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, reptiles, and birds of the air. 7 Then I heard a voice telling me, ‘Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.’

Peter did not begin with Cornelius' vision, but his own. He begins by describing the clean and unclean animals he saw on the sheet. Two important factors: 1. Luke's previous account lacks vividness: Peter's will be much more dramatic. 2. Luke's account includes 3 categories of animals: Peter's includes four (He adds “wild beasts”).

- **The Apostle's Refusal: vv. 7-8**

- “Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.”

- ‘Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’”

A Bible oddity: Ezekiel 4:11-12 –

“You are also to measure out a sixth of a hin of water to drink, and you are to drink it at set times. And you shall eat the food as you would a barley cake, after you bake it over dried human excrement in the sight of the people.” – Ezekiel 4:11-12

In the ancient world, dried animal excrement was used as a type of charcoal. God told Ezekiel to bake bread over dried human excrement as an indication of the severity of the coming captivity.

Ezekiel's response: “No Sovereign Lord. I have never defiled myself. From my youth until now I have not eaten anything found dead or mauled by wild beasts. No unclean meat has ever entered my mouth.”

Peter's response: "Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth."

- **What God Has Called "Clean": v. 9**

"Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."

The entire thing happened three times: The Old Testament declared that "by the mouth of two or three witnesses, testimony was to be established".

Dr. Ellicott: The three-fold repetition was at once general and personal in its significance. It was mystically the token of a complete ratification of the truth proclaimed. It reminded him of the three-fold command, "Feed My sheep," and taught him to take a wider range of work in obeying it (John 21:15-17)".

- **Grasping The Vision: vv. 11-13**

"Right then three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea stopped at the house where I was staying. 12 The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered the man's house."

Peter had finally grasped the meaning of the vision: The clean and unclean animals symbolized both circumcised and uncircumcised persons.

The six Messianic Jews who accompanied Peter to Caesarea were present as Peter's witnesses. They had also done the baptizing at Cornelius' home. Neither Peter nor Luke tells us whether they supported Peter at the council or joined in the criticism.

- **"A Message Through Which You Will Be Saved": vv. 13-14**

New information found in Peter's account: "He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, 'Send to Joppa for Simon

who is called Peter. He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.'"

In both the Old and New Testament a "household" did not refer only to one's immediate family. F.F. Bruce: "The "household" included not only Cornelius's immediate family in the modern English sense, but all who were under his authority slaves, attendants, and other dependents."

Cornelius' prayers and generosity paved the way not only for his salvation and his immediate family, but for all who were under his authority.

- **The Watershed Moment: vv. 15-16**

"As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. Then I remembered what the Lord had said: 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'

Peter hadn't even finished his message when the Holy Spirit fell on the Gentiles. He had only spoken about 231 words (in English) when the Spirit came on the Gentiles. (A 27-minute sermon is about 1900 words!)

Peter's thoughts wen the Spirit came on the Gentiles: "Then I remembered what the Lord had said: 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'"

Jesus' originally spoke that to the Twelve as they stood there with Him at Bethany with Him. Peter now translates that to the Gentiles' experience at Maritima.

- **"If God Gave Them The Same Giff": v. 17-18**

"So if God gave them the same giff as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?"

Peter says the Gentiles received the same gift – meaning the Holy Spirit. To his thinking, what was the definitive proof that the Gentiles had received the same gift of the Spirit?

Luke's narrative in Acts 10:45-46: "The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God."

John Stott: "In other words, this was the Gentile Pentecost in Caesarea, corresponding to the Jewish Pentecost in Jerusalem."

Verse 18: "When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, "So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life."

The "circumcision sect" certainly had plenty of objections when Peter began his story - ("You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.") Now they registered no "further objections."

- **"So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life."**

"Repentance unto life" is one way to describe salvation. See Colossians 2:13: You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins."

Repentance has brought "zoe" – the kind of eternal life that God has in Himself. It's repentance unto life that the Gentiles received. It's repentance unto life that you and I have received.

As Peter saw it, God had orchestrated the entire Cornelius' incident to demonstrate to the Messianic Jews that God did indeed plan to save the Gentiles.

- **Next time: The Gospel continues to spread.**