

Lesson Twelve

(11:1-30)

In Jerusalem, 11:1-18

11 *Now the apostles and the brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. 2 So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, 3 saying, "Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?" 4 But Peter began and explained to them in order: 5 "I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision, something descending, like a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came down to me. 6 Looking at it closely I observed animals and beasts of prey and reptiles and birds of the air. 7 And I heard a voice saying to me, 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat.' 8 But I said, 'No, Lord: for nothing common or unclean has ever entered my mouth.' 9 But the voice answered a second time from heaven, 'What God has cleansed you must not call common.' 10 This happened three times, and all was drawn up again into heaven. 11 At that very moment three men arrived at the house in which we were, sent to me from Caesarea. 12 And the Spirit told me to go with them making no distinction. These six brethren also accompanied me, and we entered the man's house. 13 And he told us how he had seen the angel standing in his house and saying, 'Send to Joppa and bring Simon called Peter; 14 he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household.' 15 As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. 16 And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, 'John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' 17 If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?" 18 When they heard this they were silenced. And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance unto life."*

V. 1 - It would not take very long for the news about Cornelius to travel to Jerusalem - so Peter was soon back in Jerusalem to give a reason for his departure from Jewish norms. The Jerusalem church was still zealous for Jewish customs many years later, Acts 21:20ff.

V. 2 - The group is not identified, anymore than those of Acts 15 or elsewhere. Indeed, in the light of this episode, Peter had not perceived the real truth about Christianity.

An added thought: it is evident that Peter was not considered infallible in his actions or understanding. In passing, we should consider that Luke records this incident twice, showing how much this new revelation meant to them and to us.

V. 3 - The objection implied in their question concerned Peter's eating with Gentiles - whether they included all of what Peter did under that particular point is guesswork. However, Peter's answer may indicate how he understood their question. As

Ch. 15 indicates, he understood that the truth he saw did away with any O.T. law being binding for Christians.

V. 5 - The Greek text shows that Peter was in a “trance” and saw a “vision”. This shows what was also clear from Ch. 10: The experience of Cornelius and that of Peter were essentially the same in nature.

V. 12 - Peter was clearly commanded to make “no distinction” between Jews and Gentiles, and had six witnesses to back up his story. The word for “distinction” can be seen in 15:9; Romans 4:20; 1 Cor. 14:29; James 1:6; Jude v.22. It could be translated, “nothing doubting”.

V. 14 - Cornelius had said (v.10:33) that he wanted to hear whatever God had commanded Peter. In Peter’s retelling, what he “had been commanded” was in words. Thus the nature of the Gospel message: faith comes only by and through a revelation in words. Faith does not come apart from a messenger of some type (spoken or written), and acceptance of that message. Hence, Christianity is a message of fact(s), addressed to the rational mind, to be received through trust in the essential reliability of the facts in that message. Some of the facts are of a historical nature - others are grounded in the nature of God as being true. Therefore, though the historical facts have ample evidence for acceptance, the believer must always rely upon God to be true to his word - so one always lives by faith, not sight.

It may be observed in passing that the basic nature of Peter’s message, i.e., that a person must hear and will to trust, precludes an infant’s being saved until such time as said infant can hear, understand, decide to obey.

V. 15 - The question to be resolved here: what does Peter mean by “just as” in his explanation? The Greek term means similar to, like, etc. It is further identified in v. 16 as “baptism” such as promised by Jesus to the apostles, and in v. 17 as “the same gift” as given to those “who believed in the Lord Jesus.”

Now, what do we have? The issue is again that of the Gentiles being acceptable to God as joint-recipients of the gospel. The Holy Spirit was clearly the indicator that God was at work, that what was happening was divine, not human. Peter then argues that God’s gift to both Gentiles and Jews makes of the two one, thus eliminating any prior differences, and also makes Christianity distinct from Judaism.

V. 17 - Peter had simply recited the facts of the matter, not even bothering to argue what they meant, since the meaning was clear to anyone who honestly considered said facts. As with Peter, who wanted to withstand God?

V. 18 - With such a presentation, the Jerusalemites could do nothing other than be quiet about the matter, and praise God for what was done. It is a good example for us to follow: if God has spoken, we must believe that his wisdom is best, and rejoice in it.

repentance unto life - This is the crucial point to remember: many things are important to salvation, but none equal the privilege of changing one's mind and obeying God's commandments which lead to life.

QUESTIONS

124. Do you wonder why the apostles in Jerusalem didn't defend Peter for his actions?

125. Did Peter argue the case or just recite the event?

126. Why was this event so important that Luke would give it to us twice?

127. What did the Spirit tell Peter in v. 12?

128. Why did God grant the Gentiles repentance unto life rather than faith unto life?

The Establishment of the Church in Antioch, 11:19-21

19 Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to none except Jews. 20 But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus. 21 And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number that believed turned to the Lord.

V. 19 - This verse refers back to 8:4. Luke has recounted part of the events following 8:4 in the life of Saul and Peter. Now the story of others is briefly given. Think what a history book could have been written if each history had been written down, and each incident doubtless was interesting in its own right. Hence, that which Luke (and other Bible authors) does record should be of utmost interest and importance.

V. 20 - Luke may indicate that others were beginning to catch a clearer understanding of the nature of the gospel message, though with no such cultural implications as in Peter's case. Note to whom the word was not spoken: Gentiles. It will take a long time for the "truth" to be perceived.

It is interesting, though how much it may mean is debatable, that the preaching done was about Jesus being "Lord" not "Christ". Some argue that "Christ/Messiah" was not relevant to Greeks, but only to Jews. However, the epistles all use the term "Christ" and most were written to Gentiles. It seems best to take "Lord Jesus" as being simply a term equal to Jesus Christ.

V. 21 - It may well be that some of those who were Jews in Antioch felt that preaching to Gentiles was fine, but only by total submission to the law (as in Acts 15) was salvation possible. Maybe others would accept Gentiles as Christians, but maintain a stand off policy insofar as social fellowship, was concerned. At any rate, some Hellenists (as in Acts 6) were turning (cf. 3:19; also note 11:18 -repentance is a change of mind, a "turning") to God/the Lord.

The Early Labors of Barnabas and Saul, 11:22 - 12:25

In Jerusalem, 11:22

22 News of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch.

V. 22 - The choice of Joseph (Barnabas) was quite appropriate - he was not a Jerusalem Jew and thus might well have more empathy for Hellenistic converts than others might. Note also v. 24. For a land without any of the modern means of communication, news traveled fast, didn't it?

At Antioch, 11:23, 24

23 When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad; and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose; 24 for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a large company was added to the Lord.

V. 23 - The work of Barnabas was to encourage the believers to keep abiding in Christ, and this he kept doing. Is it not interesting that God's grace can be seen? Note that grace also teaches (Tit. 2:11) and is given (Eph. 3:8) and can be grown in (II Peter 3:18). There is a play on words in this verse, as the Greek root for "grace" and "was glad" is the same.

steadfast purpose - Christianity is not only a beginning in Jesus, it is also a continuing in Jesus. It is quite possible - indeed, truthful and necessary - to be "once saved, always saved" - though not in the sense these words are normally used.

At Tarsus, 11:25, 26a

25 So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul; 26 and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church, and taught a large company of people;

V. 25 - Remember that Saul was probably a Jew who spoke Greek, and thus would be helpful in the work among Greek-speaking people. Of course, Barnabas knew that Saul's mission was to the Gentiles. With the work enlarging in Antioch, he was a natural for the task of helping the Hellenists as well as Jews who yet had trouble with the law versus Christianity.

V. 26 - The name "Christian" is a very common formation like many other Latin words that were formed in that era, although the word itself is Greek. It is not strange that a distinct term should come into being to designate those who were not Jews, and not Gentiles (in the religious sense). Since so many had become believers in Antioch (which was a large and important city in that time), it seems only natural that the name should come into being. The word "Christian" only occurs twice more (26:28 and I Peter 4:16) in the N.T., although it was common in other religious literature of the days following the first century. It is pertinent to remark that Saul "taught" for a year. He did not always "evangelize" in the narrow sense that word is often used.

In Antioch, 11:26b-30

and in Antioch the disciples were for the first time called Christians.

27 Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over the world; and this took place in the days of Claudius. 29 And the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brethren who lived in Judea; 30 and they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

V.27 - Prophets were quite evident in the early Church, as is seen in Ephesians 4:11, etc. Their function is not clearly spelled out, though from this text, Acts 21:11; etc., it can be seen that they stood in the same general category as those before them: revealers of God's message to people. It is somewhat a travesty on the word to use it today to apply to preachers.

V. 28 - **The days of Claudius** - Approximately A.D. 44-48. Claudius ruled as emperor of Rome from A.D. 41-54.

V. 29 - The Greek text might be translated: “as anyone was well off (or able to do so), such people determined to minister (be a servant/deacon) to the brethren in Jerusalem.”

V. 30 - The offering was sent to Jerusalem, and the elders of the church in Jerusalem are specifically identified as those who received it. The church had progressed in growth to the point that men within it were qualified to be elders. Hence, as is taught elsewhere, the elders ministered to the church, even though apostles were present. In Ch. 15, the elders play just as important a part as the apostles. In the epistles, elders are considered as the leaders in the local church. The apostles had a task to do, and did it, but that task was not to oversee the local assemblies when men qualified to be elders were within the group. Such men were chosen and were held accountable for the local group under them. Paul will later take another offering to the brethren in Judea, Acts 21.

QUESTIONS

129. Some years have passed since the foundation of the church in Acts 2. Why do you suppose the preaching was to Jews (or Hellenists) and not bona fide Gentiles?

130. What figure of speech is found in 11:22?

131. How does one “see” the grace of God?

132. Can a person maintain a right relationship to the Lord and so be “once saved, always saved”?

133. What did Saul and Barnabas do in Antioch and for how long? (Did Saul/Paul recommend something of this nature in II Tim. 2:2)?

134. If the famine predicted by Agabus was to be over the whole world, why did the disciples in Antioch decide to help the brethren in Judea?

135. To whom was the offering sent? Who were the ones who took it?

136. Does the sending of the help indicate a realization that brethren whoever, wherever, were members of the same body, so that if one member suffered, all members suffered?

ABA REVIEW QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 12

1. What truth did Peter see as a result of his vision from God and the conversion of Cornelius and his household as described in Acts 15?

2. Christian faith comes to an individual only by what means or method?

3. In Acts 11:12, the word “distinction” can also be translated as “_____.”

4. Complete the textbook author’s comment: “Hence, _____ is a message of _____, addressed to the _____, to be received through _____ in the essential reliability of the _____ in that _____.”

5. Does Peter’s basic message that a person must hear and will to trust preclude an infant from being saved until such time as that infant can hear, understand, and decide to obey? Explain.

6. What were the implications of the Holy Spirit being given to both the Jews and the Gentiles?

7. Complete the textbook writer's comment: "...many things are important to _____, but none equal the privileges of _____ one's _____ and _____ God's _____ which lead to _____."

8. Is the term "Christ/Messiah" relevant to Greeks and Jews alike or only to the Jews? Explain.

9. What does the word "repentance" mean?

10. Christianity is not only a beginning in Jesus, but what else?

11. What three commendable things are said of Barnabas (11:24)?

12. Where were the disciples first called "Christians"?

13. Explain the background of the term "Christian".

14. How many times does the term "Christian(s)" appear in the New Testament, and where are these passages located?

15. Prophets were revealers of what and to whom?

16. During what period did Claudius rule as emperor of Rome?

17. Who was Agabus and what did he do?

18. What term was used to designate the leaders in the early church?

19. Did elders minister in the early church even though the apostles were present?
Explain.

20. What were the basic duties of the elders?