

Text: Acts 11:1-18

Title: Peter Explains Himself (and God)

Truth: God's work among the Gentiles is confirmed.

Date/Location: Wednesday 3/6/2013 and 2/21/2024 at FBC

Introduction

For some reason, Simon Peter did not travel back to Joppa where he had been with the tanner, also coincidentally named Simon. He went back to Jerusalem. There, Peter was in trouble with his Jewish friends because he went into a Gentile home and ate with Gentiles (10:28). This was not a “kosher” thing to do for a Jewish person.

I. The Jewish Believers Respond with Criticism, v. 1-3

- A. Notice that the text speaks of two groups: apostles and brethren (11:1). Then in verse 2 Luke mentions “those of the circumcision.” He had used this phrase in 10:45 to refer to the Jewish Christians who had traveled with Peter from Joppa to Caesarea. These brothers who traveled with Peter saw the situation with their own eyes and could not argue with what God was doing. But their compatriots in Jerusalem—also Jewish Christians—were not up to speed on what happened. They were a very large subset of the “brethren” mentioned in verse 1.
- B. The apostles and brothers in Judea heard about this situation ahead of Peter's return to Jerusalem. This gave them a little bit of time to mull it over. Unfortunately, they did not have the same insights that Peter had, nor had they heard him explain the vision that God had given him, nor did they have the same experience that the other Jewish eyewitnesses had. Consequently, they hastily responded in a wrong way. They did not know the full information yet (Prov. 18:13).
- C. The brothers of the circumcision contended with Peter. The word *contend* means to have a difference or take issue with someone, or dispute with someone. Jude 9 is an example use of the word. The circumcision brothers were firmly opposed to what he had done and were criticizing him for it. These were Jewish believers who still had to get over the idea that Gentiles were pariahs. Some did not get the message at this time. Perhaps, because they held tenaciously to this Mosaic notion they became a splinter group. In Acts 15 there were some who pushed the idea that a person must be circumcised in order to be saved. If the splinter-group theory is correct, their doctrine became more extreme and unbiblical. The council described in Acts 15 put that issue to rest, but

there are still folks who do not accept the council's decision. People who follow the Hebrew Roots movement seem to be of this general sort.

- D. The believers in Jerusalem were obviously upset by what Peter did. They assumed that it was all Peter's doing—that God had nothing to do with it. They did not realize the part about God directing the whole situation behind the scenes.
- E. **Application:** A hasty response can be a very faulty response, and in any case our responses should not be hasty. We should have patience, and we should have all the facts before we jump to a conclusion. That is hard to do, is it not?
- F. **Application:** Our responses need to be based on the truth of what God is doing and has revealed, not on what we think at the moment. These men needed the full story before they could make a proper evaluation of what happened.
- G. **Application:** The idea of contention is not a pleasant one. However, as in this case, we should look for ways to turn contention into a beneficial situation. This contention and the Biblical answer to the contention served to solidify the church's doctrine and to strengthen the church in its unity between Jews and Gentiles. So, it was "good."

II. Peter Reviews What Happened, v. 4-17

- A. Setup for the visit, 11:4-12a. Peter explains the vision and how it affected his understanding about the cleanliness of the formerly unclean foods. The juxtaposition with the three (Gentile) men made it clear to his Jewish friends that God was doing something significant about the Gentiles.

Peter reiterated that he had six witnesses with him. This is far more than the two or three witnesses required by the law of Moses (Deut. 19:15).
- B. The visit itself, 11:12b-16. Notice that the men were concerned about Peter "going in" to the home of uncircumcised men, and "eating with them." In contrast, Peter was concerned about what was happening with the gospel. This is an important lesson for us.
- C. **Application:** We can be all twisted into knots about something that is of secondary importance to what God is doing—here spreading the missionary reach of the gospel to a new people.
- D. **Application:** Maybe this is part of the answer to the question about why more of our prayers are not answered. Perhaps we are too focused on things of secondary importance and not praying the right things. Perhaps someone has cancer, and we are praying for their physical healing.

Maybe God is not going to heal them but is going to help them to grow more like Christ through the trial of cancer, and we could more positively pray that they make good progress in the change that God wants to make in them.

- E. Peter learned that God was giving salvation to the Gentiles. He was just beginning to get up to speed on the idea that the church is a multi-ethnic single body, not an exclusive uni-ethnic body of Jews only, nor a multi-ethnic multi-body of Jews and Gentiles in different churches.
- F. He *began* to speak. Notice that he did not actually do much. He did not do enough to make the result redound to his own credit. The credit was obviously God's because the change started far too quickly after Peter began to speak for it to be Peter's powerful speech that effected all the change. Like Gideon's 300 men who were not enough to defeat the Midianites, Peter did hardly anything. God sent the Spirit to the listeners.
- G. Peter correlated what he saw with Pentecost in Acts 2 and how Spirit baptism had just taken place on these people. This was the event that marked the church as a new entity in Acts 2, and now these people were being added to it.
- H. By the way, by means of this passage, we know that the birthday of the church was after Acts 1:5 and before Acts 11:16. Rather obviously, the record of the birth of the church is in Acts 2.
- I. Conclusion, 11:17. Peter could not argue with God. God is the giver of the gift of salvation and the gifts associated with salvation. What He gave to the first Jewish believers was precisely the same as what He gave to the Gentiles in Acts 10:44-46. The gift is specifically the baptizing ministry of the Holy Spirit. That was promised in Acts 1:5, and the apostles and others experienced it in Acts 2:2-4. Since God gave the same things to the Gentiles, the Jews cannot criticize Peter for partaking in God's work.

Peter could not withstand God. No one at Cornelius's house could forbid water for baptism. This was God's work, not man's, and it cannot be stopped (Deut. 3:24, Acts 5:38-39, Daniel 4:35).

III. The Jewish Believers Now Respond with Praise, v. 18

- A. Upon hearing all this, they became silent—they were thinking. It was a moment of awe at what God was doing. They concluded that God was working among the Gentiles. This was amazing to them.

But it should not have been a surprise. Consider Amos 9:12. Or Isaiah 11:10 (LXX), as quoted in Matthew 12:21, Rom. 15:12, as well as Isaiah 42:1. See also Isaiah 9:1 and Matthew 4:15.

- B. Now that they understood the situation, they responded by glorifying God. Same situation. Same people. Same day, very likely the same *hour*. But new information, and that information from *God*. The response was totally different. *Criticism* toward a *man* turned into *praise* toward *God*. God's truth does that.
- C. The Jews' glorification of God consisted in their admitting to God's work among the Gentiles. They doxologized, that is, glorified, God. Whenever we talk about God's wonderful works, we can, if we do so properly, glorify Him. He can and should receive honor because of the great things He has done.
- D. The work of God was that He "granted repentance to life to the Gentiles."
 1. *Grant* comes from the common verb "to give." This thing is a gift. What is the gift?
 2. *Repentance* is itself the gift. Repentance is the change of mind about sin and God and comes upon a person when they turn to God from idols, self, sin, money, pride, etc. and instead turn to Jesus. Note that this is a change of mindset, not behavioral perfect. God grants that disposition of mind as a gift. Let's thank God for it.
 3. To life. Repentance results in life instead of death. Christians use this to speak about eternal life, that state of connection with God which the Christian experiences. It is the state of rescue from sin and death. It is the life of nourishment and hydration from God instead of drying up and dying in your pursuit of sin.
 4. To the Gentiles. We have considered this notion above.

Conclusion

Chapter 10 and the first part of chapter 11 deal with a major stride forward in God's gospel program to the world. *We* are completely accustomed to this notion, but if you place yourself in Jewish shoes, you can better understand how this shook their basic worldview. Many preferred the "old ways" and traveled down the path of circumcision, and some even became Judaizers. But the new way was upon the world, the way of faith, and the way that provides for eternal cleansing from sin.

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