

**Acts Bible Study**  
**October 1, 2024**  
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c. *Peter and Cornelius (chap. 10)*

The importance of this event is seen in the fact that Luke recounts it three times—here in Acts 10, again in chapter 11, and finally in 15:6–9. The geographic extension of the gospel in Acts is an initial fulfillment of Jesus' words in Matthew 8:11: "Many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places ... in the kingdom of heaven."

(1) The vision of Cornelius (10:1–8). 10:1. By separate visions both Peter and **Cornelius** were prepared for this momentous happening. Cornelius and his vision are described first. Cornelius was a **centurion**, a Roman officer in charge of 100 soldiers, in **the Italian Regiment**, consisting of 600 soldiers. In the New Testament centurions are consistently viewed in a favorable light (cf. Matt. 8:5–10; 27:54; Mark 15:44–45; Acts 22:25–26; 23:17–18; 27:6, 43). **Centurion Cornelius became one of the first Gentiles after Pentecost to hear the good news of Jesus Christ's forgiveness.**

10:2. From the description of Cornelius as **devout** (*eusebēs*, used only here and in v. 7; 2 Peter 2:9) **and God-fearing** ("righteous and God-fearing," Acts 10:22), it can be inferred he was not a full-fledged proselyte to Judaism (he had not been circumcised, 11:3), but he did worship Yahweh. Evidently he attended the synagogue and to the best of his knowledge and ability followed the Old Testament Scriptures. Nevertheless, he had not entered into New Testament salvation (cf. 11:14).

10:3–6. **The time reference, 3 in the afternoon, may refer to a Jewish time of prayer (cf. 3:1). If so, the Lord approached Cornelius by means of an angel while he was at prayer (cf. 10:9).** Later Cornelius called this angel "a man in shining clothes" (v. 30). **Cornelius** responded to **the angel** by asking, **What is it, Lord?** Perhaps "Lord" (*kyrie*) here means "Sir" (cf. comments on 9:5). This soldier's piety was evidenced by his **prayers** and his generous giving **to the poor** (cf. 10:2). The angel instructed him to send for **Simon ... Peter** at the home of **Simon the tanner** (cf. 9:43).

10:7. **When the angel who spoke to him had gone,** the centurion **called** three of his men—two **servants** and a military aide, also a **devout man** (*eusebē*; cf. v. 2).

Undoubtedly these three had been influenced by Cornelius' devotion.

10:8. **He told them everything that had happened.** Related to the Greek participle used here (*exēgēsamenos*) **is the English noun "exegesis." The verb means he "explained" everything.**

The three went off to **Joppa, some 33 miles south** of Caesarea (v. 24), to bring Peter back to Cornelius.

(2) The vision of Peter (10:9–16). 10:9. That **Peter** prayed morning and evening may be assumed, for those were normal times of prayer. **In addition he prayed at noon.** Prayer three times a day was not commanded in the Scriptures, but Peter followed the example of pious men before him (cf. Ps. 55:17; Dan. 6:10). Peter **went up to the (flat) roof to pray;** this would have given him privacy.

10:10–12. While **hungry,** Peter **fell into a trance** in which God gave him a vision of a **sheet coming down to earth with all kinds of ... animals ... reptiles ... and birds.**

10:13–14. When God commanded **Peter** to **eat** of these animals, his response was, **Surely not, Lord!** Significantly his refusal (“surely not”) was *mēdamōs*, a more polite and subjective term than *oudamōs* (“by no means,” used only in Matt. 2:6). This was the third time in Peter’s career that he directly refused God’s will (cf. Matt. 16:23; John 13:8).

**Peter** knew from the Law that he should not eat **unclean** animals (Lev. 11). But could he not have killed and **eaten** the clean animals and left the unclean? Probably Peter understood the command to include them all. Or possibly the large sheet contained only unclean animals.

10:15. **Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.** This rebuttal gives Mark 7:14–23 more meaning (cf. 1 Tim. 4:4). It is generally recognized that Mark wrote down Peter’s words. In retrospect Peter must have recognized that Jesus as the Messiah cleansed all goods from ceremonial defilement.

10:16. Why did Peter refuse **three times** to eat the unclean foods? For one thing, this indicated emphasis. **But more than that it revealed certainty and truth. Here was one place where Peter was being scrupulous beyond the will of God. His intentions were good, but he was being disobedient.** Also, was there some link here with Peter’s threefold denial (John 18:17, 25–27) and with his three affirmations of his love for the Lord? (John 21:15–17)

(3) The visit of the messengers (10:17–23a). 10:17–22. In marvelous timing and by the coordination of the sovereign God the three messengers and **Peter** met. **The Holy Spirit**, who told Peter about the arrival of the **three men**, may have been the One whose unidentified voice Peter heard earlier (vv. 13, 15).

**The men ... from Cornelius** spoke highly of him (cf. vv. 2, 4) and conveyed to **Peter** their purpose in coming.

10:23a. **Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests.** Since Peter had been waiting for his noon meal (cf. v. 10), he undoubtedly now shared it with his visitors. Perhaps he was already beginning to discern the lesson of his vision!

(4) The visitation of Gentiles (10:23b–43). 10:23b. By the time **Peter** and his guests finished lunch it must have been too late to start back to Caesarea that day. **The next day** they began the almost-two-day trip. (Cornelius’ emissaries had left Caesarea after 3 p.m. one day [vv. 3, 8] and arrived at noon two days later [vv. 9, 19]. Cf. “four days ago” in v. 30.)

Peter took with him **some of the brothers from Joppa**. The two-by-two motif is common in the Gospels and Acts; Christian workers often went out by twos. In this debatable situation at least six people accompanied Peter (11:12). So there would be seven witnesses to attest to what would transpire.

10:24. **Cornelius was so confident that Peter would come and he was so expectant of Peter’s message that he called together his relatives and close friends.**

10:25–26. When **Peter** arrived, **Cornelius** prostrated himself before the apostle in worship. The verb *prosekynēsen* means “he worshiped” and is here translated in **reverence**. **Peter**, refusing this kind of obeisance, urged Cornelius to **stand up**, for, **he said, I am only a man myself.**

10:27–29. **Peter was well aware of the consequences of his fellowshiping with Gentiles in their homes (cf. 11:2–3), but he had learned the lesson of the vision well. The**

command to eat unclean animals meant he was **not to call any man impure or unclean**. So he **came without protest**.

10:30–33. After **Cornelius** recounted the circumstances that brought **Peter** to his house he said, **Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us**. What a divinely prepared audience!

10:34–35. These words of **Peter** were revolutionary. They swept away the prejudice and indoctrination of generations of Judaism. However, Gentile salvation certainly was a doctrine known in the Old Testament (cf. Jonah; Gen. 12:3). In the Old Testament the Jews were God's Chosen People, the special recipients of His promises and revelation. Here Peter stated that God's program was reaching out to the world through the church. There is considerable debate about Peter's words that God **accepts men from every nation who fear Him and do what is right**. This does not teach salvation by works because a person's first responsibility before God is to fear Him, which is tantamount to trusting Him and reverencing Him. It is the New Testament parallel to Micah 6:8. Furthermore, God's acceptance of such people refers to His welcoming them to a right relationship by faith in Christ (cf. Acts 11:14).

10:36–37. Peter then outlined the career of **Christ** (vv. 36–43), the sovereign **Lord of all**, through whom **God sent ... the good news of peace**. Bible students have often observed how this parallels the Gospel of Mark almost perfectly. Mark began with John's **baptism** and traced the ministry of the Lord Jesus from **Galilee** to **Judea** to Jerusalem and finally to the Crucifixion, Resurrection, and the Great Commission.

10:38. The word *Messiah* means "Anointed One"; so when Peter said, **God anointed Jesus of Nazareth** he was saying, "God declared Him the Messiah" (cf. Isa. 61:1–3; Luke 4:16–21; Acts 4:27). This declaration occurred at the Lord's baptism (cf. Matt. 3:16–17; Mark 1:9–11; Luke 3:21–22; John 1:32–34). Isaiah spoke of the Anointed One performing great deeds (Isa. 61:1–3), and as Peter declared, **He went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil**.

10:39–41. Peter affirmed that he and his associates were personal eyewitnesses of all Jesus **did**. **They**, that is, **the Jews ... killed Him by hanging Him on a tree**, an ignominious form of execution. Earlier Peter had told Jews **in Jerusalem**, "You killed the Author of life" (3:15); to the rulers he said, "You crucified" Him (4:10); and to the Sanhedrin he replied, "You killed" Him "by hanging Him on a tree" (5:30). And Stephen too told the Sanhedrin, "You ... have murdered Him" (7:52). On five occasions in Acts, the apostles said they were **witnesses** of the resurrected Christ (2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:41; 13:30–31). After Christ's resurrection the disciples **ate and drank with Him** (cf. John 21:13). This was proof that the resurrected Lord Jesus was no bodiless phantom and it explains how Christ was **seen** (Acts 10:40).

10:42–43. Peter made it clear that Christ's ministry results either in judgment (v. 42) or salvation (v. 43). The key phrase is, **Everyone who believes in Him**. This Greek construction consists of a present participle with an article, which is almost the equivalent of a noun (in this case "every believer in Him"). The key element in salvation is faith, belief in Christ. This message of **forgiveness of sins** (cf. 2:38; 5:31; 13:38; 26:18) **through** faith in the Messiah was spoken of by the prophets (e.g., Isa. 53:11; Jer. 31:34; Ezek. 36:25–26).

(5) The vindication by the Spirit (10:44–48). 10:44–45. Peter’s message was rapidly concluded by the sovereign interruption of **the Holy Spirit** who **came on all those who heard** Peter’s **message** about Jesus and believed. **The six** (cf. v. 23; 11:12) **circumcised believers ... were astonished** (*exestēsan*; “they were beside themselves”; cf. 9:21) at this evidence of equality of **Gentiles** with Jewish believers. 10:46. The sign which God used to validate the reality of Gentile salvation was **speaking in tongues**. (For the significance of tongues-speaking in Acts, see the comments on 19:1–7.)

10:47–48. **Peter** quickly discerned at least three theological implications of what had happened: (1) He could not argue with God (11:17). (2) Cornelius and his household, though uncircumcised (11:3), were **baptized** because they had believed in **Christ**, as evidenced by their receiving **the Holy Spirit**. The order of these events was believing in Christ, receiving the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, and being baptized in water. (3) The reality of Cornelius’ conversion was confirmed by Peter’s staying with him several **days**, probably to instruct him more fully in his newfound faith.

2. the preparation of the apostles for a universal gospel (11:1–18).

a. *The accusation (11:1–3).*

11:1–2. The response on the part of Jewish Christians was mixed. **The expression circumcised believers (also used in 10:45) evidently describes Christians who still held to the Law of Moses (cf. 15:5; 21:20; Gal. 2:12).**

11:3. The accusation lodged against Peter was that he **went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them**. The primary problem was not his preaching to Gentiles but his eating with them (cf. Mark 2:16; Luke 15:2; Gal. 2:12). This gives even greater significance to Peter’s vision (Acts 10:9–16). Eating with someone was a mark of acceptance and fellowship (cf. 1 Cor. 5:11). This problem could have caused a serious break in the church.

b. *The answer (11:4–17).*

11:4–14. **Peter** recounted to the circumcised believers in Jerusalem briefly what had occurred (cf. chap. 10), including his **vision** (11:5–7), his response to it (vv. 8–10), and the trip to Cornelius’ **house** (vv. 11–14).

11:15–16. In recounting what happened next, Peter made an important identification of the day of Pentecost with the Lord’s prediction of **Spirit baptism (1:4–5)**. **Luke did not state specifically in chapter 2 that Pentecost was that fulfillment, but Peter here pointedly said so by the phrase at the beginning (cf. 10:47, “just as we have,” and 11:17, “the same gift as He gave us”). The Church Age, then, began on the day of Pentecost.**

11:17. Peter’s defense did not rest on what he himself did, but on what *God* did. **God** had made no distinction between Jew and Gentile, so how could Peter?

c. *The acquittal (11:18).*

11:18. With Peter the saints recognized that the conversion of **Gentiles** was initiated by **God** and that they should not stand in His way. This response had two ensuing and significant results. First, it preserved the unity of the body of Christ, the church. Second, it drove a huge wedge between Church-Age believers and temple-worshippers in Jerusalem. Before this the common Jewish people looked on Christians with favor (cf.

2:47; 5:13, 26), but soon thereafter the Jews opposed the church. This antagonism is attested by Israel's response to the execution of James (12:2–3; cf. 12:11). Perhaps this concourse with Gentiles was a starting point of the Jewish opposition.

3. the preparation of the church at antioch for a universal gospel (11:19–30).

a. *The cosmopolitan nature of the church (11:19–21)*

This is a crucial hinge in the Acts account. For the first time the church actively proselytized Gentiles. The Samaritans of chapter 8 were partly Jewish; the Ethiopian eunuch on his own was reading Isaiah 53 on his return from Jerusalem; and even Cornelius took the initiative in seeking the gospel from Peter's lips. But here the church took the first steps to take the message to uncircumcised Greeks.

11:19. The narrative reaches back to **Stephen** (8:1–2) to point to still another result of his martyrdom. His death had helped move the gospel into Samaria (cf. the similarity between 8:4 and 11:19). Also Stephen's death had incited Saul to persecute the church more vigorously (8:3) and he consequently was converted (9:1–30). Now a third result from Stephen's martyrdom was the spreading of the gospel to Gentile lands (**Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch**).

11:20. The reference to **Antioch** in Syria prepares the reader for the importance of this city in the subsequent narrative. This city, one of many bearing the same name, was the third largest in the Roman Empire behind Rome and Alexandria. Located on the Orontes River 15 miles inland, it was known as Antioch on the Orontes. Beautifully situated and carefully planned, it was a commercial center and the home of a large Jewish community. In spite of the fact that it was a vile city, with gross immorality and ritual prostitution as part of its temple worship, the church at Antioch was destined to become the base of operations for Paul's missionary journeys. The Roman satirist, Juvenal, complained, "The sewage of the Syrian Orontes has for long been discharged into the Tiber." By this he meant that Antioch was so corrupt it was impacting Rome, more than 1,300 miles away.

This amazing step forward for the gospel to the Gentiles (**Greeks** at Antioch) was accomplished by unnamed helpers of the faith. Nevertheless this was a bold and critical move by these believers from **Cyprus**, the island not too far from Antioch, and **Cyrene**, a city in North Africa (cf. Matt. 27:32; Acts 2:10; 6:9; 13:1).

11:21. The clause **believed and turned to the Lord** does not necessarily refer to two separate actions. The Greek construction (an aorist participle with an aorist finite verb) often indicates that the two actions are simultaneous. This clause, then, means, "in believing, they turned to the Lord."

b. *The confirmation of the church (11:22–26)*

11:22. Such an important move on the part of **the church** could not escape the attention of the mother church in **Jerusalem**. Earlier the Jerusalem apostles sent Peter and John to check up on Philip's ministry in Samaria. Now the Jerusalem saints **sent Barnabas** all the way to **Antioch**, over 300 miles north. The selection of that delegate was of crucial importance; and Barnabas was a wise choice for several reasons. First, he, like some of these Christian ambassadors, was from Cyprus (4:36; 11:20). Second, he was a generous man (4:37) and therefore thoughtful of others. Third, he was a gracious gentleman as attested by his nickname (4:36) and Luke's testimony about him (11:24).

11:23. Barnabas could not escape the conclusion that **God** was genuinely at work in Antioch, and as Luke often noted there was the response of joy. True to his nickname, Son of Encouragement (4:36), he **encouraged** the believers (cf. 14:23). (Barnabas is also mentioned in 9:27; 11:25, 30; 12:25; 13:1–2, 7, 43, 46, 50; 14:3, 12, 14, 20; 15:2, 12, 22, 25, 35–37, 39; 1 Cor. 9:6; Gal. 2:1, 9, 13; Col. 4:10.)

11:24. Three things were said about Barnabas: **he was a good man, he was full of the Holy Spirit, and he was full of faith** (Stephen too was full of faith and the Holy Spirit; 6:5). Luke wrote this description of Barnabas *after* the confrontation between Paul and Barnabas, recorded in 15:39. Since Luke was Paul's traveling companion, this statement about Barnabas must have been Paul's assessment as well.

11:25. The work in Antioch grew to such proportions **Barnabas** needed aid, and he could think of no one better suited for the work than **Saul** who was living in **Tarsus** (cf. 9:30). Possibly some of the sufferings and persecutions Paul described in 2 Corinthians 11:23–27 took place while he was in Tarsus. This may also be where Paul had the revelation described in 2 Corinthians 12:1–4. Based on Acts 22:17–21, some think that Saul was already ministering to Gentiles when Barnabas contacted him to bring him to Antioch.

11:26. **Barnabas and Saul** ministered a full year in **Antioch**, teaching **great numbers of people**. The church was continuing to grow numerically (cf. 2:41, 47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:1; 9:31; 11:21, 24).

Jesus' **disciples were first called Christians at Antioch**. The ending “-ian” means “belonging to the party of”; thus “Christians” were those of Jesus' party. The word “Christians” is used only two other times in the New Testament: in 26:28 and 1 Peter 4:16. The significance of the name, emphasized by the word order in the Greek text, is that people recognized Christians as a distinct group. The church was more and more being separated from Judaism.

*c. The charity of the church (11:27–30).*

11:27. Believers from Jerusalem with the gift of prophecy **came down from Jerusalem to Antioch**. (Though going north, they went “down” because Jerusalem is on a much higher elevation than Antioch.)

11:28. **Agabus**, also mentioned again in 21:10–11, prophesied **that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world**. This was actually a series of severe famines that struck various sections of the Roman Empire **during the reign of Emperor Claudius** (a.d. 41–54.) This same Claudius later expelled Jews from Rome (18:2). (See the list of Roman emperors at Luke 2:1.)

11:29–30. The Christians at Antioch, **each according to his ability** (cf. 1 Cor. 16:2; 2 Cor. 9:7), sent money to the believers **in Judea**. This expression of love undoubtedly bound the two churches together (cf. Rom. 15:27).

When **Barnabas and Saul** brought the gift to Judea, they gave the **gift to the elders**. This is the first mention of church elders in Acts and significantly they received finances. Evidently they had ultimate oversight over all aspects of the ministry. Later Paul and his companions presented the offering of the churches of Achaia, Macedonia, and Asia Minor to the elders of the Jerusalem church. This may have happened when Paul arrived in Jerusalem (Acts 21:18; though this verse doesn't refer to offering money).

Though there is some question about it, this famine visit in 11:27–30 is probably the same one referred to in Galatians 2:1–10.

4. the persecution of the church at Jerusalem (12:1–24)

The purpose of this section of Acts is to confirm Israel's rejection of the Messiah. Luke has skillfully woven this theme throughout the entire book and it can be seen up to this point in 4:1–30 (esp. 4:29); 5:17–40; 6:11–8:3; 9:1–2, 29. This animosity of Israel set the stage for the first missionary journey.

a. *The martyrdom of James (12:1–2).*

12:1–2. Artfully, Luke contrasted the love of the church at Antioch for the saints at Jerusalem with the coldhearted enmity of **Herod** and the Jews for **the church**.

The Herod mentioned here is Agrippa I, a ruler popular with the Jews for he was partly Jewish, being of Hasmonean descent. His kingdom covered basically the same area as that of his grandfather Herod the Great. He was known for doing everything possible to curry the favor of the Jews, so he found it politically expedient to arrest Christians and to execute **James, the brother of John**. Herod Agrippa I died in a.d. 44. His son, Herod Agrippa II, was king of Judea from a.d. 50–70. Paul was on trial before Agrippa II and his sister Bernice (25:13–26:32). (See the chart on the Herods at Luke 1:5.)

b. *The imprisonment and escape of Peter (12:3–19)*

This incident clearly indicates that the church was an identifiable group which had become hated and despised by the Jews.

12:3–4. The execution of James **pleased the Jews** so Herod apprehended and incarcerated **Peter ... during the Feast of Unleavened Bread**. This seven-day spring feast followed immediately after the Passover. **Herod intended to bring out Peter for public trial after the Passover**. The "Passover" here referred to the combined eight-day festival, the Passover itself followed by the seven days of unleavened bread. For at least two reasons Herod would find it expedient to execute Peter. First, Peter was known as the leader of the church, and second, he had fraternized with Gentiles. Herod made certain that Peter's imprisonment was secure by **handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each!** Probably this means two were chained to Peter, one on each side and two were standing guard outside (cf. vv. 6, 10). The four squads probably were each on guard for six hours each. Evidently the authorities remembered Peter's earlier escape (cf. 5:19–24) and Herod did not want that to happen again.

12:5. **So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him**. The contrast is obvious: Peter was bound, but prayer was loosed!

12:6. **Peter** was so trusting the Lord that he was sound asleep the **night before his trial** (cf. 1 Peter 2:23; 5:7). He did not fear for his life because Christ had said he would live to an old age (John 21:18).

12:7–10. This is the second time **an angel** helped Peter escape (cf. 5:17–20).

Awakening **Peter**, the angel told him to get dressed **and follow him out of the prison**. Supernaturally God caused **the chains** to fall **off his wrists**, kept the guards asleep, and opened **the iron gate**.

12:11. One of the subthemes of Acts is the outreach of the gospel in spite of opposition. This is seen in Peter's release. When **Peter came to himself**, braced by the night air,

he acknowledged God's deliverance for him **from** Herod and the Jews. He now knew this was no vision (v. 9).

12:12. This verse introduces the reader to John **Mark** who figures prominently in Paul's first missionary journey. Evidently his mother **Mary** was a woman of prominence and means. Probably her house was a principal meeting place of the church, so it must have been spacious. Because John Mark's father is not named, Mary may have been a widow. This same Mark is considered to be the writer of the Gospel bearing his name (cf. Mark 14:51–52; 1 Peter 5:13).

12:13–17. The story of **Peter's** unsuspected arrival at John Mark's home is filled with humor and human interest. Joy in the Book of Acts is also evident here in the **servant girl ... Rhoda** who answered Peter's knock and **recognized his voice**. Though the saints were praying earnestly (v. 5) for Peter's release, they did not expect an answer so soon! When Rhoda insisted, **Peter is at the door!** they replied, **You're out of your mind. It must be his angel**. This statement implies a belief in personal angels, that is, angels who are assigned to individuals (cf. Dan. 10:21; Matt. 18:10). It also suggests a belief that an angel may look like the person with whom he is identified!

When they **saw** Peter, **they were astonished** (*exestēsan*; cf. 9:21). Peter's mention of **James** indicates that James had a place of prominence in the Jerusalem church. Quite clearly this James was the Lord's half brother.

After making himself known to the brothers, Peter **left for another place**. Where this was is not known. It is possible, because of 1 Peter 1:1, to say he went to Asia Minor. Later Peter was at Antioch of Syria (Gal. 2:11). Paul referred to Peter's itinerant ministry (1 Cor. 1:12; 9:5).

12:18–19. After an investigation of Peter's escape, **Herod ... cross-examined the guards and ruthlessly ordered** their executions. Herod no doubt justified such harshness by reasoning that guards whose prisoners escape are irresponsible and unreliable. Yet Herod lost 16 guards by his actions (cf. v. 4). **Herod** then left **Judea** to stay for **a while** in **Caesarea**, the capital of the Roman province of Judea, from which Roman governors governed the nation.

c. *The death of Herod Agrippa I (12:20–23).*

12:20–23. **Tyre and Sidon** were in Herod's dominion and for some reason had incurred his wrath. Because these cities **depended on** Galilee for grain, they desired to make **peace** with Herod Agrippa. Probably they bribed **Blastus, a trusted personal servant of the king**, to work out a reconciliation. **On the appointed day** when **Herod** was delivering a speech, **the people** honored him as **a god**, and the Lord **God** judged him with death. This was in a.d. 44. This account parallels that given by Josephus in his *Antiquities of the Jews* (19. 8. 2). After Herod's death, Felix and Festus, successively, were the governors of Judea.

Three of Herod's children figure prominently in the later narrative of Acts—Drusilla, the wife of Felix (24:24–26); Bernice (25:13, 23), and Herod Agrippa II (25:13–26:32).

d. *The prosperity of the church (12:24).*

12:24. **But the Word of God continued to increase and spread** (cf. similar wording in 6:7; 13:49; 19:20). In spite of opposition and persecution the Lord sovereignly prospered the work of His church. With this progress report Luke brought another



section of his work to a conclusion (cf. 2:47; 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:30–31). From Antioch the gospel message was now ready to go to Asia Minor.

*B. The extension of the church in Asia Minor (12:25–16:5).*

1. the call and dedication of barnabas and saul (12:25–13:3).

12:25. After depositing the famine relief money with the elders at **Jerusalem** (11:27–30), **Barnabas and Saul** returned to Antioch. They took **with them John ... Mark** (cf. 13:5), a cousin of Barnabas (Col. 4:10) from Jerusalem (Acts 12:12).

*[First missionary journey, chaps. 13–14]*

13:1. **The church at Antioch** now became the base of operation for Saul's ministry. Jerusalem was still the mother church, but the missionary church was Antioch on the Orontes River. Furthermore, Peter was no longer the central figure; Saul became that. The diversity in the backgrounds of the leaders of the church at Antioch shows the cosmopolitan nature of the church. **Barnabas** was a Jew from Cyprus (4:36). **Simeon** was also a Jew, but his Latin nickname **Niger** not only indicates he was of dark complexion but also that he moved in Roman circles. He could be the Simon of Cyrene who carried Christ's cross (Matt. 27:32; Mark 15:21), but this is highly debatable. **Lucius** was from **Cyrene** in North Africa (cf. Acts 11:20). **Manaen** had high contacts for he **had been** reared **with Herod the tetrarch**, actually Herod Antipas, who beheaded John the Baptist and who treated the Lord so shamefully at His trial (see the chart on the Herod family at Luke 1:5). One in that court (Manaen) became a disciple; the other (Herod) an antagonist! At the end of the list, for he was last on this scene, was **Saul**, a Jew trained in Rabbinical schools. Despite their variegated backgrounds, these men functioned as one.

Perhaps the name of Barnabas appears first in the list because as the delegate from the mother church in Jerusalem he held the priority position.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Stanley D. Toussaint, "[Acts.](#)" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 379–387.

**10:1** The narrative begins by introducing the first main character. His name was Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian regiment who resided in Caesarea. Each of these details is significant. That he was mentioned by name is perhaps indicative that he was well known in the early Christian communities for whom Luke wrote.<sup>627</sup> He was a military man with the rank of centurion, which placed him in command of 100 soldiers.<sup>638</sup> One is immediately reminded of Jesus' encounter with a centurion at Capernaum who was described as well respected by the Jewish community, much like Cornelius (Luke 7:1–10). Centurions generally are depicted in a favorable light throughout the Gospels and Acts, and this may well be evidence of the success of the early Christian mission among the military. Cornelius's division is described as the "Italian regiment," a group that is documented as occupying Palestine after a.d. 69.<sup>649</sup> The place of his residence is of some importance, since Caesarea was from a.d. 6 the provincial capital and place of residence of the Roman governor. Unlike Lydda and Joppa, which were mainly inhabited by Jews, Caesarea was a Hellenistic-style city with a dominant population of Gentiles. Originally a small town named Strato's Tower, it was rebuilt on a grand style by Herod the Great, complete with a man-made harbor, a theater, an amphitheater, a

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<sup>267</sup> "Cornelius" represents the second of three names Romans generally bore and was fairly common among the military, largely because in 82 B.C., P. Cornelius Sulla freed 10,000 slaves. Many of these freedmen served in the military and took the name of their benefactor. See Cadbury, *The Book of Acts in History*, 76.

<sup>368</sup> The main division in a Roman army was the *legion*, consisting of 6,000 men. These were divided into ten cohorts of 600 soldiers each. These in turn were subdivided into groups of 100 under a centurion, which groups were considered the backbone of the army. The Roman historian Polybius described centurions as "not seekers of adventure but men who can command, steady in action, reliable." Cf. F. J. Foakes-Jackson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, MNTC (New York: Harper, 1931), 88.

<sup>469</sup> An inscription found in Austria indicates the Italian cohort was an auxiliary division. (Auxiliary forces usually consisted of soldiers drawn from the territory where they were located rather than consisting of Roman citizens, as was the case with the regular legions.) See *Beginnings* 5:427–45. Whether a Roman division would have been located in Caesarea in the period of Herod Agrippa's rule over Palestine (A.D. 41–44) is debated. Quite possibly some Roman auxiliary forces were under his command, and one corps is known to have been located in Caesarea. See Bruce, *Acts: NIC*, 214–15. That Cornelius was retired from service and settled in Caesarea is also possible, as the presence of his rather large household might indicate.

hippodrome, and a temple dedicated to Caesar. There was a substantial Jewish minority there and considerable friction between the Jews and the larger Gentile community.<sup>750</sup> It was fitting that it should be the place where Peter came to terms with his own prejudices and realized that human barriers have no place with the God who “does not show favoritism.”

**10:2** Cornelius already had some preparation for the gospel he was soon to hear. Luke described him as “devout” (*eusebēs*) and “God-fearing” (*phoboumenos ton theon*). There is some question about whether the term “God-fearer” should be seen as a technical term designating a special class of Gentile adherents to the Jewish synagogue who had not taken the full step of becoming proselytes to Judaism.<sup>761</sup> Cornelius, however, was clearly a Gentile who worshiped God and supported the Jewish religious community. In fact, he was described as performing two of the three main acts of Jewish piety—prayer and almsgiving. (Only fasting is not mentioned.) In short, his devotion to God put him well on the way, preparing him for receiving the gospel and for the full inclusion in God’s people that he could not have found in the synagogue.

**10:3** In the course of the practice of Cornelius’s piety, God spoke to him. Cornelius was keeping one of the three traditional Jewish times of prayer, the afternoon hour of 3 p.m., which coincided with the *Tamid* sacrifice in the temple. God’s agent was an angel who appeared to him in a vision. Frequently in Luke-Acts God used prayer time as the opportunity for leading to new avenues of ministry.<sup>772</sup> Prayer is a time for opening oneself up to God, thus enabling his leading. Visions occur frequently in Acts as a vehicle of divine leading, which illustrates that the major advances in the Christian witness are all under divine direction.<sup>783</sup> In no case is that clearer than in the present instance. Cornelius and Peter took no initiative in what transpired. Their mutual visions illustrate that all was totally under God’s direction.

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<sup>570</sup> J. D. Williams, *Acts*, GNC (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 171.

<sup>671</sup> The view that the terms *σεβούμενος* and *φοβούμενος* refer to a special class of Gentile synagogue worshipers has been generally assumed by scholars. For example, see G. F. Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927), 1:323–26. One of the first to challenge whether they are technical terms was Lake in *Beginnings* 5:74–96. More recently A. T. Kraabel has questioned, largely on the archaeological evidence, whether there was a significant group of Gentiles attached to the Diaspora synagogues at all (“The Disappearance of the God-fearers,” *Numen* 28 [1981]: 113–26). See also M. Wilcox, “The ‘God-fearers’ in Acts—A Reconsideration,” *JSNT* 13 (1981): 102–22. There is, however, considerable literary evidence for such a group of nonproselyte Gentile adherents to the synagogues of the NT period. See T. M. Finn, “The God-fearers Reconsidered,” *CBQ* 47 (1985): 75–84. It probably is best not to consider *σεβούμενος* and *φοβούμενος* as technical terms invariably referring to such Gentile adherents but to give attention to each separate context in which the word occurs. In the case of Cornelius, the context clarifies that he was indeed a Gentile worshiper of God and seemingly not a proselyte to Judaism.

<sup>772</sup> Luke 3:21f.; 6:12–16; 9:18–22, 28–31; 22:39–46; Acts 1:14; 13:1–3.

<sup>873</sup> Cf. 9:10, 12; 10:3, 17, 19; 11:5; 16:9–10; 18:9; 27:23, 25.

**10:4** Cornelius's response to the heavenly epiphany is understandable. It was a response of awe and reverence (*emphobos*), not of cowering fear (v. 4). Much like Paul, Cornelius addressed his heavenly visitant with a respectful "Lord." The angel responded by noting that God was aware of his piety.<sup>794</sup> His prayer and his acts of charity had gone up as a "memorial offering" in the presence of God. The term "memorial" (literally, "remembrance," *mnemosynon*) is Old Testament sacrificial language.<sup>7105</sup> Cornelius's prayers and works of charity had risen like the sweet savor of a sincerely offered sacrifice, well-pleasing to God (cf. Phil 4:18). The importance of Cornelius's piety is reiterated throughout the narrative (vv. 2, 4, 22, 35).

**10:5–8** One would like to know the content of Cornelius's prayer. Could it possibly have requested his full acceptance by God, his full inclusion in God's people?<sup>7116</sup> At this point the angel revealed nothing to Cornelius about his ultimate purpose for him, simply that he was to send to Joppa for a certain Simon named Peter. The additional note that Peter was staying with the tanner Simon serves to link the narrative with the previous (9:43) and was essential in providing the needed directions for locating him. Still very much in the dark about what God had in store for him, Cornelius neither questioned the angel further nor hesitated in complying with directions. He called forth two of his servants<sup>7127</sup> and a "devout" soldier, who probably was a worshiper of God like himself. The Greek text adds that all three "continually waited on him," which is a classical expression for "orderlies," for those who are most tried and true. Cornelius was thus careful to choose his most trustworthy attendants to go to Joppa and seek Peter.

## **(2) The Vision of Peter (10:9–16)**

**9**About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. **10**He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance.

**11**He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. **12**It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. **13**Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat."

**14**"Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean."

**15**The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."

**16**This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.

**10:9** Joppa was about thirty miles to the south of Caesarea. Having set out the same day as Cornelius's vision or early the next morning, the attendants approached Joppa about noon the next day. Peter in the meantime had gone up to the flat roof of Simon's

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<sup>974</sup> Angels were often viewed as intercessors in prayer (cf. Tob 12:12).

<sup>1075</sup> Lev 2:2, 9, 16; cf. Phil 4:18; Heb 13:15f.

<sup>1176</sup> Suggested by Pesch, 1:337.

<sup>1277</sup> The word for servant (οἰκέτης) refers to household servants who were considered part of the family, as opposed to mere slaves (δοῦλοι). Cf. Luke 16:13; Rom 14:4; 1 Pet 2:18.

house in order to pray.<sup>7138</sup> Hungry and waiting for a meal to be prepared, he fell into a trance.

**10:10–16** Noon was not a usual weekday meal time. The custom was to have a light midmorning meal and a more substantial repast in the late afternoon. If Peter had missed his midmorning breakfast, it would explain his drowsiness all the more.<sup>7149</sup> Roofs were often covered with awnings. Perhaps that or the glimpse of a distant sail at sea provided the vehicle for the vision Peter had. He saw a large vessel or container like a large sheet descending from heaven, held by its four corners. Some interpreters suggest a symbolic meaning here, the four corners representing the ends of the earth in a vision, the ultimate meaning of which points to the worldwide mission.<sup>8150</sup> The sheet contained representatives of all the animals of the earth—four-footed animals, reptiles of the land, and birds of the air.<sup>8161</sup> It thus symbolized the entire animal world and included clean as well as unclean animals.<sup>8172</sup> A voice from heaven commanded Peter to rise, kill from among the animals, and satisfy his hunger. Peter was perplexed by the vision and protested vigorously. What the voice requested was strictly against the law.<sup>8183</sup> Never had he eaten anything defiled and unclean.<sup>8194</sup> The voice ignored his

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<sup>1378</sup> Roofs were a common place of prayer and worship. Cf. 2 Kgs 23:12; Neh 8:16; Jer 19:13; 32:29; Zeph 1:5. Noon was not a set hour of prayer for Jews, but prayer was not confined to the prescribed times.

<sup>1479</sup> The word πρόσπεινος, used here for Peter's hunger, is only found elsewhere in first-century literature in an account about an eye doctor named Demosthenes from Laodicea. See F. W. Dillistone, "Prospeinos (Acts x.10)," *ExpTim* 46 (1934–35): 380. This observation is often cited in support of the medical theory for Lukan authorship, as is the occurrence of ἀρχαῖς ("corners") in v. 11, a term that is used in medical writings for the ends of bandages.

<sup>1580</sup> So Pesch, *Apostelgeschichte* 1:338.

<sup>1681</sup> This is the same threefold division of the animal world as found in the Noah account of Gen 6:20 and the creation account of Gen 1:30. Cf. Rom 1:23.

<sup>1782</sup> In general, unclean animals were those which showed some anomaly with reference to their species as a whole. Thus sea creatures without the usual fish scales were unclean. Four-footed beasts were considered normal if they had cloven hooves and chewed the cud. Pigs do not chew the cud and are thus unclean. See Lev 11. See also G. J. Wenham, "The Theology of Unclean Food," *EvQ* 53 (1981): 6–15.

<sup>1883</sup> Cf. Lev 11:2–47; Deut 14:3–21. Although no evidence suggests that clean animals were defiled by mere contact with unclean animals, one would assume Peter's reaction was provoked by his sheer disgust at so many unclean animals making any further discrimination impossible. Possibly *only* unclean animals were in the sheet.

<sup>1984</sup> C. House argues that the two terms (κοινός and ἀκάθαρτος) in v. 14 should be distinguished, κοινός referring to something defiled by association and ἀκάθαρτος being something inherently unclean, thus making the application to the Gentile mission more precise—unclean Gentiles and Jewish Christians defiled by association with them ("Defilement by Association: Some Insights from the Usage of *Koinos/Koinoō* in Acts 10 and 11," *AUSS* 21 [1983]: 143–53). This might hold for 11:8, where a disjunctive ἢ ("or") occurs, but not for 10:14, where the two terms are linked by the conjunctive καί ("and").

protest, reissuing the command and adding, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.” The command came three times; each time Peter objected and fell into further confusion.<sup>8205</sup>

Some scholars feel that Peter’s vision dealt more with food laws than with interaction with Gentiles. This is to overlook the fact that the two are inextricably related. In Lev 20:24b–26 the laws of clean and unclean are linked precisely to Israel’s separation from the rest of the nations. The Jewish food laws presented a real problem for Jewish Christians in the outreach to the Gentiles. One simply could not dine in a Gentile’s home without inevitably transgressing those laws either by the consumption of unclean flesh or of flesh that had not been prepared in a kosher, i.e., ritually proper, fashion (cf. Acts 15:20). Jesus dealt with the problem of clean and unclean, insisting that external things like foods did not defile a person but the internals of heart and speech and thought render one truly unclean (Mark 7:14–23). In Mark 7:19b Mark added the parenthetical comment that Jesus’ saying ultimately declared all foods clean. This was precisely the point of Peter’s vision: God declared the unclean to be clean.<sup>8216</sup> In Mark 7 Jesus’ teaching on clean/unclean was immediately followed by his ministry to a Gentile woman (7:24–30), just as Peter’s vision regarding clean and unclean foods was followed by *his* witness to a Gentile. It is simply not possible to fully accept someone with whom you are unwilling to share in the intimacy of table fellowship. The early church had to solve the problem of kosher food laws in order to launch a mission to the Gentiles. Purity distinctions and human discrimination are of a single piece.

### **(3) Peter’s Visit to Cornelius (10:17–23)**

**<sup>17</sup>While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon’s house was and stopped at the gate. <sup>18</sup>They called out, asking if Simon who was known as Peter was staying there.**

**<sup>19</sup>While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Simon, three men are looking for you. <sup>20</sup>So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them.”**

**<sup>21</sup>Peter went down and said to the men, “I’m the one you’re looking for. Why have you come?”**

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<sup>2085</sup> Pesch (*Apostelgeschichte* 1:339) cites an ancient source, according to which one could only be certain that a vision was truly from God rather than from demonic influences if it occurred three times. Whether or not this ancient mode of “testing the spirits” is at play here, surely the importance of its message for Peter was the primary reason for the repetition.

<sup>2186</sup> E. Haulotte sees a “new creation” theme in Peter’s vision. The animals represented all those of God’s original creation. God declared them all clean, thus establishing a new community in Christ in which all people are acceptable (“Foundation d’une communauté de Type Universal: Actes 10, 1–11, 18,” *RSR* 58 [1970]: 63–100). The most fascinating interpretation was that of Augustine, who applied the vision of Peter directly to the mission of the church. The church is to “kill and eat,” to kill the sins of the godless and digest them into the life of the church (Bovon, *De Vocatione Gentium*, 177–80).

**<sup>22</sup>The men replied, “We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to have you come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say.” <sup>23</sup>Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests.**

**The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa went along.**

**10:17–23** At this point Peter was still in the dark about the meaning of his vision. What possible point could this implied nullification of the food laws have? At that very moment the answer to his puzzle was beginning to come forth, as Cornelius’s messengers arrived at Simon the tanner’s. Now the Spirit spoke to him directly. With Cornelius it had been an angel; with Peter’s vision, a voice from heaven. Now it was the Holy Spirit. All three represent the same reality—the direction of God. Nothing was left to chance. All was coordinated by the divine leading. The Spirit directed Peter to the three messengers standing at the gate and identified them as men he had sent (v. 19f.).<sup>8227</sup> In accordance with the Spirit’s direction, Peter descended the outside staircase that led from the roof to the courtyard below, identified himself, and eagerly inquired why they were seeking him. By now he had a good notion that they were a key piece in the puzzle of his vision. The men replied with the information Peter needed, which is all material the reader has already encountered. Luke could have summarized by simply noting that they told him of Cornelius’s vision. Instead, by employing dialogue, he repeated and thus underlined the important points of the vision.

Two things in particular are emphasized—the devoutness of Cornelius and the leading of God.<sup>8238</sup> There is a slight advance over the original account of the vision in vv. 4–6. The messengers informed Peter that Cornelius was to “hear what you have to say” (v. 22). Peter began to see the ramifications of his vision. He was to witness to this centurion whom God had directed to him. That Peter was beginning to understand is exemplified by his inviting them to spend the evening as guests. Already he was beginning to have fellowship with Gentiles he formerly considered unclean.<sup>8249</sup>

#### **(4) Shared Visions (10:24–33)**

**<sup>24</sup>The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. <sup>25</sup>As Peter entered the house,**

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<sup>2287</sup> B reads “two men” at v. 19, and many scholars feel this may be the original reading. If so, the soldier would not be considered a messenger but one who functioned as a guard.

<sup>2388</sup> The reference to the angel “telling him” in v. 22 employs the word χρηματίζω, which in this context has the meaning of a divine communication by revelation. The word seems to have originally meant *to do business*, then *to consult an oracle*, then *to be divinely directed* (as here), and finally *to receive a name* (from one’s activity or business). The latter meaning occurs in Acts 11:26. See A. T. Robertson, *WP* 3:139.

<sup>2489</sup> To be sure, the problem of table fellowship was less acute when a Jew entertained a Gentile than in the reverse situation, as would be the case when Peter dined at Cornelius’s (v. 48b). Still, scrupulous Jews avoided any association with Gentiles (G. Krodel, *Acts*, ACNT [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986], 192, citing *Jub.* 22:16 and Joseph and Asenath 7:1).

**Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. <sup>26</sup>But Peter made him get up. “Stand up,” he said, “I am only a man myself.”**

**<sup>27</sup>Talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. <sup>28</sup>He said to them: “You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean. <sup>29</sup>So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?”**

**<sup>30</sup>Cornelius answered: “Four days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me <sup>31</sup>and said, ‘Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor. <sup>32</sup>Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea.’ <sup>33</sup>So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us.”**

**10:24–26** Peter and the three messengers set out the next morning accompanied by several of the Jewish Christians from Joppa. According to Peter’s report in Jerusalem, there were six of the latter (11:12). After spending the night en route, they arrived at Caesarea on the fourth day from Cornelius’s original vision (cf. v. 30). Cornelius had invited a number of relatives and close<sup>9250</sup> friends to hear Peter, and they were all gathered at his home when the party from Joppa arrived. This would prove to be of considerable importance to subsequent events. The movement of the Spirit in Cornelius’s home would not be an isolated conversion but would involve a considerable number of Gentiles, what Luke called “household” salvation (11:14). As Peter entered the house,<sup>9261</sup> Cornelius fell at his feet in a gesture of reverence and respect.<sup>9272</sup> Peter protested vigorously—even more in the Western text, which adds, “What are you doing?” to the Alexandrian reading, “I am only a man myself.” Compare the similar protest of Paul and Barnabas when the Gentiles at Lystra attempted to sacrifice to them as gods (Acts 14:14f.).<sup>9283</sup>

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<sup>2590</sup> Ἀναγκαίους—“intimate, familiar, close.”

<sup>2691</sup> The Greek text has simply “as Peter entered” and does not specify “the house.” Assuming Peter was entering the outskirts of the city, the Western text adds that Cornelius sent a slave out as a scout, who returned to announce Peter’s arrival. For a similar practice among present-day Arabs, see E. F. F. Bishop, “Acts x.25,” *ExpTim* 61 (1949–50): 31.

<sup>2792</sup> Such behavior would not have been unusual for a Gentile like Cornelius. Prostrating oneself at the feet of another was a common Near Eastern gesture of respect, and Cornelius surely identified Peter with his angelic vision and may well have seen him as more than an ordinary man. Bowing as an act of reverence is particularly frequent in Matthew: cf. 8:2; 9:18; 15:25; 18:26; 20:20; cf. Luke 8:41; Acts 9:4; 22:7.

<sup>2893</sup> Even the angel of Rev 19:10; 22:9 refused such gestures of worship. Such strict monotheism was absolutely essential in a Gentile culture where humans were often revered as being related to divinities. Herod Agrippa offers a contrast with Peter’s refusal to be revered (Acts 12:22f.).



**10:27–29** After a polite introductory conversation with Cornelius, Peter related the unusual circumstances of his coming. He did not tell of his vision but rather of the conclusion he had drawn from the experience. Everyone present needed to realize how unacceptable it was for a Jew to associate closely or even visit in the home of a person of another race.<sup>9294</sup> God, however, had shown Peter that he should not call another person common or unclean (v. 28). Actually, Peter’s vision had only related to unclean foods, but he had understood fully the symbolism of the creatures in the sheet. All were God’s creatures; all were declared clean. God had led him to Cornelius, and God had declared Cornelius clean. The old purity laws could no longer separate Jew from Gentile. Since God had shown himself no respecter of persons, neither could Peter be one anymore. Still, Peter had not realized the full implication of God’s sending him to Cornelius. He did not yet understand that God intended him to accept Cornelius as a *Christian brother*. So he asked Cornelius why he had sent for him. Cornelius responded by reiterating his vision (vv. 30–32).

**10:30–32** This is now the *third* time the reader has encountered this experience. It is virtually a summary of vv. 3–8 with slight variations, such as the notice that it was now four days since the vision occurred<sup>9305</sup> and the fact that he spoke of a “man in shining clothes” rather than an angel. A man in shining clothes is, of course, an angel; so it is merely a variation in expression.<sup>9316</sup> Even Peter’s location in Joppa is repeated in detail. The emphasis and the reason for the repetition is to underscore the importance of the divine direction that led to this scene. Peter was not yet fully certain *why* he was at Cornelius’s house.

**10:33** Everyone there, however, *including* Peter, was certain of one thing: *God* had brought them together. Cornelius also knew that God brought Peter to him to share something important. That is why he assembled family and friends. All were now waiting to hear the Lord’s message from Peter (v. 33).<sup>9327</sup> God had led him to Cornelius’s house. But Peter had a message, *the* message, the word of life. It was now clear to him why God had led him there. He was to bear his witness to the gospel before this gathering of Gentiles.

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<sup>2994</sup> No specific law forbade Jews to associate with Gentiles, but the purity regulations rendered close social interaction virtually impossible. Robertson (*WP* 3:141) cites Juvenal’s *Satire* 14.104f. and Tacitus’s *Hist.* 5.5 as evidence from Gentile writers that such Jewish refusal to associate with Gentiles was in fact the practice. According to S. Wilson, this passage is the closest in Acts to actually abrogating the Jewish laws (*Luke and the Law* [Cambridge: University Press, 1983], 63–73).

<sup>3095</sup> The Greek could be construed in v. 30 as “four days ago until this hour, I was praying,” thus indicating Cornelius’s continual prayer for four days. The NIV is surely correct in translating “at this hour.”

<sup>3196</sup> For dazzling garments representing heavenly beings, cf. Luke 9:29f.; 24:4; Acts 1:10.

<sup>3297</sup> Cornelius’s reference to being gathered together “in the presence of God” is very much the language of being assembled for *worship*, which is not inappropriate to this context. Cf. 1 Cor 5:4; Marshall, *Acts*, 189. The group gathered in Cornelius’s home recalls the group gathered in Acts 1:13–14 awaiting Pentecost.

**(5) Peter's Witness (10:34–43)**

<sup>34</sup>Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism <sup>35</sup>but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right. <sup>36</sup>You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. <sup>37</sup>You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached—<sup>38</sup>how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

<sup>39</sup>“We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, <sup>40</sup>but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. <sup>41</sup>He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. <sup>42</sup>He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. <sup>43</sup>All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

**10:34–35** Peter's sermon is somewhat unique among the speeches in Acts. Since it was addressed to Gentiles, one would expect it to differ somewhat from the other sermons of Peter, all of which were addressed to Jews. Still, it is quite different from Paul's sermons addressed to the Gentiles of Lystra (14:15–18) and Athens (17:22–31). Cornelius and his family already were worshipers of God and thus had some prior preparation for the gospel. Peter could have assumed such knowledge on their part and not have to start by first introducing the basic monotheistic message of faith in God as he did when preaching to pagan Gentiles. Peter's sermon at Cornelius's basically followed the pattern of his prior sermons to the Jews but with several significant differences. One is found at the very outset, where he stressed that God shows no favoritism, accepts people from every nation, and that Jesus is “Lord of all.” This emphasis on the universal gospel is particularly suited to a message to Gentiles. Peter's vision had led him to this basic insight that God does not discriminate between persons, that there are no divisions between “clean” and “unclean” people from the divine perspective. The Greek word used for favoritism (v. 34) is constructed on a Hebrew idiom meaning *to lift a face*.<sup>9338</sup> Peter saw that God does not discriminate on the basis of race or ethnic background, looking up to some and down on others. But God does discriminate between those whose behavior is acceptable and those whose attitude is not acceptable. Those who reverence God and practice what is right are acceptable to him (v. 35; cf. Luke 8:21).

Peter was basing this statement specifically on Cornelius. Throughout the narrative his piety had been stressed—his constant prayers, his deeds of charity. This raises the

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<sup>3398</sup> For God's judgment on the basis of one's conduct, see also Gen 4:7; Rom 2:6; Rev 20:12f. For God's impartiality cf. Eph 6:9; Col 3:25, Jas 2:1, 9; 1 Pet 1:17; Rev 22:12. The idiom “lifting a face” pictures God as an oriental monarch lifting the face of a petitioner. To lift the petitioner's face is to receive him or her with favor (cf. Esth 4:11; 5:2, where the custom is different but the import is the same).

problem of faith and works. Was God responding to Cornelius's works, "rewarding" him, so to speak, by bringing Peter with the saving gospel and granting him his gift of the Spirit? One must be careful not to introduce Paul's theology into a context that is not dealing with the same issues, but one should also note that even Paul was capable of describing the impartial justice of God as being based on one's good or evil works (Rom 2:9–11).<sup>9349</sup> The early church fathers struggled with the question of faith and works in Cornelius, and perhaps Augustine's view offers as good an answer as any. Cornelius, like Abraham, had shown himself to be a man of faith and trust in God. God was already working his grace in him, and it manifested itself in his good deeds.<sup>10350</sup> Now God would show him his greatest grace in the gospel of Jesus Christ and the gift of the Spirit. The stress on both Cornelius's devoutness *and* his works is perhaps, then, a good corrective to an abused doctrine of grace with no implications for behavior and a reminder of James's dictum that at base, faith and works are inseparable.

**10:36** As with Peter's other addresses in Acts, considerable stress is placed on God's act in Jesus Christ. This theme is introduced in v. 36, where Peter stressed the good news of peace through Jesus Christ.<sup>10361</sup> There is an interesting interplay in the verse between the limited nature of the gospel's beginnings and its unlimited scope. God sent the gospel message to his people, "the people of Israel." But its *content* was peace, the peace Christ brings, who is "Lord of all." If he is truly Lord of *all*, then the gospel *and* Christ's peace are for all peoples, not just the people of Israel. Verse 36 echoes Isa 52:7; 57:19. In Eph 2:17 Paul employed the latter passage to argue the universal gospel and the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile in Christ. Peter also had come to see that it is a natural corollary that there can be no barriers between those who profess Christ as "Lord of all." He could not allow such nonessentials as particularistic Jewish food laws to separate him from Gentiles like Cornelius who were, like him, those for whom Christ died. Where Christ is Lord of all, a worldwide witness and a worldwide fellowship of believers free of all cultural prejudice are absolutely imperative.

**10:37–38** Verse 37 begins the explicit treatment of Jesus' life, which continues through v. 42. This section is unique among the speeches of Acts in the amount of attention it gives to the ministry of Jesus. The other speeches of Peter emphasize the death and resurrection, as does this speech (vv. 39–40). Only the sermon in Cornelius's house, however, provides an outline of Jesus' earthly ministry (vv. 37–38). In fact, these verses

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<sup>3499</sup> For a helpful contrast between Rom 2 and Acts 10, see J. M. Bassler, "Luke and Paul on Impartiality," *Bib* 4 (1985): 546–52.

<sup>35100</sup> Bovon, *De Vocatione Gentium*, 315.

<sup>36101</sup> The Greek syntax of vv. 36–38 is notorious, consisting of several dangling clauses whose relationships to the main sentence are unclear. In general, translators take three main approaches: (1) to transpose "you know" from v. 37 to v. 36 and see "the word" (v. 36) as its object (RSV); (2) to drop the relative pronoun after "word" in v. 36 and make two separate sentences for vv. 36–37 (NEB, NIV); (3) to see v. 36 as in apposition to the phrase "God is no respecter of persons" of v. 34 (first suggested by H. Riesenfeld). See Marshall, *Acts*, 191. The NIV (option 2) provides the best solution from a grammatical perspective. Theologically, option 3 is extremely attractive, making God's impartiality the underlying assumption of the entire gospel message.

are almost a summary of the outline of Jesus' life as presented in Mark's Gospel: the baptism of John, the Galilean period with its extensive healing ministry, the death and resurrection.<sup>10372</sup> That Peter began the summary of Jesus' career with "you know" (v. 37) is interesting. He could perhaps have assumed that Cornelius, residing in Caesarea, would have heard some prior report of John's baptizing and Jesus' reputation for miracles. Paul later made a similar assumption that these events could not have escaped king Agrippa's knowledge because they "did not happen in a corner" (26:26). His reference to Jesus' being anointed with the Spirit (v. 38) most likely refers to the descent of the Spirit on Jesus at his baptism (Luke 3:22). In turn, the anointing with the Spirit is closely tied with Jesus' miracles in Luke's Gospel, as it is here (Luke 4:18f., citing Isa 61:1f.).<sup>10383</sup>

**10:39–42** In v. 39 Peter turned to his role as apostolic witness to the entire ministry of Jesus (cf. 1:22) and above all to his death and resurrection. As in 5:30, Jesus' crucifixion is described as "hanging him on a tree." As always in Peter's speeches, the crucifixion is attributed to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. In v. 40 the familiar kerygmatic formula occurs: *they* killed him, but *God* raised him up on the third day.<sup>10394</sup> Particularly striking and unique to this sermon is Peter's stress on Jesus' appearance to the apostles after his resurrection, even his eating and drinking with them.<sup>10405</sup> This emphasis would have been particularly important in preaching to Gentiles like Cornelius for whom the idea of a bodily resurrection was a new concept (cf. 17:18). Peter concluded his treatment of the apostolic witness by referring to Jesus' command for them to preach the word (Acts 1:8) and especially to testify that Jesus is the one

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<sup>37102</sup> C. H. Dodd in *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1936) argued that Mark wrote his Gospel on the basis of the sort of kerygmatic summary found in Acts 10:37–42. This line has recently been taken up by P. Stuhlmacher, "Zum Thema: Das Evangelium und die Evangelien," and R. Guelich, "The Gospel Genre," in *Das Evangelium und die Evangelien*, ed. P. Stuhlmacher (Tübingen: Mohr, 1983), 1–26; 183–219. For an opposing view, which would trace Acts 10:37–43 to Luke rather than kerygmatic tradition, see A. Weiser, "Tradition und lukanische Komposition in Apg. 10, 36–43," in *A Cause de l'Évangile*, ed. F. Refoulé (Paris: Cerf, 1985); cf. U. Wilckens, "Kerygma und Evangelium bei Lukas (Beobachtungen zu Acta 10, 34–43)," *ZNW* 49 (1958): 227–30.

<sup>38103</sup> Jesus' miracle-working is described as εὐεργετῶν in v. 38, a term that would have been meaningful to a Gentile—"one who works good deeds." It was a term often applied to Hellenistic kings (cf. Ptolemy Euergetes). The true disciple, however, eschews such honorific titles and is instead a servant (cf. Luke 22:25f.). Only God is the true "benefactor."

<sup>39104</sup> "On the third day" occurs only here and in Paul's resurrection tradition in 1 Cor 15:3. By Jewish inclusive reckoning, which would have considered Friday the "first day," Jesus rose on the third day.

<sup>40105</sup> Cf. Luke 24:30, 41–43; Acts 1:4.

appointed by God as eschatological judge (v. 42).<sup>10416</sup> The role is that of the Danielic Son of Man, and Peter perhaps was interpreting the title in terms that would have been comprehensible to a Gentile.<sup>10427</sup>

One characteristic element of other sermons by Peter has to this point been lacking in this one—the proofs from the Old Testament Scriptures.<sup>10438</sup> Peter seems to have been moving in this direction when he referred to the witness of the prophets to Jesus (v. 43), and he connected this closely with repentance and forgiveness of sins. Perhaps Peter's line of thought was related to Jesus' words to the disciples after the resurrection, where the Scriptures that predict Christ's suffering and resurrection are also closely tied to repentance and forgiveness in his name (Luke 24:46–48). In any event, Peter seems to have been moving toward his appeal with the references to the coming judgment and to repentance and forgiveness through Jesus' name. He was, however, cut short. The miracle of repentance and forgiveness occurred before he could even extend the invitation, and the Spirit sealed the event.

#### **(6) *The Impartiality of the Spirit (10:44–48)***

**<sup>44</sup>While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. <sup>45</sup>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. <sup>46</sup>For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said, <sup>47</sup>“Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.” <sup>48</sup>So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.**

**10:44–48** As they listened to Peter's words about forgiveness for everyone who believes in Christ, the Holy Spirit suddenly descended upon all the Gentiles assembled in Cornelius's house (v. 44). They began to speak in tongues and to praise God (v. 46).<sup>10449</sup> It was an audible, visible, *objective* demonstration of the Spirit's coming upon

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<sup>41106</sup> For Jesus' being “appointed” by God, see 2:23; 3:20; and especially 17:31, where the reference is to his appointment as eschatological judge, as it is here. For the phrase “the living and the dead,” cf. 2 Tim 4:1; 1 Pet 4:5.

<sup>42107</sup> For the Son of Man as eschatological judge, see Dan 7:13f. and John 5:22, 27.

<sup>43108</sup> Parallels to Acts 10 and the story of Jonah include: the mention of Joppa (Jonah 1:3; Acts 10:8), the importance of the number 3 (Jonah 3:2; Acts 10:20), the repentance of the Gentiles (Jonah 3:5; Acts 10:43), the hostile response to their repentance (Jonah 4:1; Acts 11:2), and God's rebuttal of this response (Jonah 4:2–11; Acts 11:17–18). See R. W. Wall, “Peter, ‘Son of Jonah’: The Conversion of Cornelius in the Context of the Canon,” *JSNT* 29 (1987): 70–90.

<sup>44109</sup> The NIV footnote gives the alternative “other languages”; that reflects the Western text, which adds ἐτέραις. This makes the event in Acts 10 parallel to Pentecost. “Speaking in tongues” (λαλούντων γλώσσαις) is the better-attested reading and refers most likely to the phenomenon of tongue-speaking, which Paul sought to regulate in 1 Cor 12–14. In Peter's report in Jerusalem, the mode of the Spirit's expression is never mentioned. Peter was interested not in the manner of the Spirit's expression but that the

them. Peter and the Jewish Christian brothers from Joppa witnessed the event and were astounded that God had so given the gift of the Spirit to the Gentiles (v. 44). It has often been described as the “Gentile Pentecost,” and that designation is appropriate. In v. 47 Peter practically gave it that designation when he described the Gentiles as having received the Holy Spirit “just as we have.” Like the Pentecost of Acts, it was a unique, unrepeatable event. It was scarcely programmatic. The sequence, for one, was most unusual, with the Spirit coming before their baptism. The pattern of a group demonstration of the Spirit invariably accompanies a new breakthrough in mission in Acts. We see it in the initial empowering of Pentecost, the establishment of the Samaritan mission (8:17–18), the reaching of former disciples of John the Baptist (19:6), and the foundation of the Gentile mission and its legitimation for the Jerusalem church. Always the demonstration of the Spirit serves a single purpose—to show that the advance in witness comes directly from God, is totally due to divine leading. This was especially important in this instance. Peter had already shown his own hesitancy to reach out to Gentiles. More conservative elements in Jerusalem would be even more reticent. Only an undeniable demonstration of divine power could overrule all objections, and God provided precisely that in Cornelius’s house. Surely the Spirit had already moved among the Gentiles gathered there in a more inward experience of repentance and faith. Luke hinted at this. The very last words in the Greek text of Peter’s sermon before the Spirit descended are “everyone who believes in him.” The faith of the Gentiles is even more explicit in Peter’s report to Jerusalem, where he compared his own experience of belief in Christ and receipt of the Spirit with the experience of Cornelius and his fellow Gentiles (11:17).

Peter called for the baptism of the Gentiles (v. 47) in language that is highly reminiscent of the Ethiopian eunuch’s request for baptism (8:36). As with the eunuch, there was now no barrier, no way anyone could hinder (*kōlyō*) the baptism of these Gentiles and their full inclusion into the Christian community. The NIV obscures the similarity in the questions “Why shouldn’t I be baptized?” and “Can anyone keep these people from being baptized?” Both questions involve the verb “to hinder.”

Another obstacle had been overcome in the ever-widening scope of Christian mission, the barrier of national and racial particularism and separatism, the barrier of prejudice that looks down on others as “unclean.”<sup>11450</sup> It is interesting that Peter gave orders for them to be baptized. Evidently he did not baptize them himself but committed the task to some of those who had accompanied him from Joppa. This is further evidence that the early Christian leaders put no premium on *who* administered the rite.<sup>11461</sup>

The narrative concludes with the note that Peter spent several days with his new Christian brothers and sisters in Caesarea (v. 48b). This inevitably involved table

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Spirit had been granted to the Gentiles. See J. Dupont, *Nouvelles Etudes sur les Actes des Apôtres* (Paris: Cerf, 1984), 102.

<sup>45110</sup> See F. Stagg, *The Book of Acts: The Early Struggle for an Unhindered Gospel* (Nashville: Broadman, 1955), 120.

<sup>46111</sup> Cf. Paul’s disclaimer in 1 Cor 1:14–17 and Jesus’ refusal to administer the rite in John 4:2.

fellowship, but that now presented no problem for Peter.<sup>11472</sup> It would, however, constitute a major difficulty for more conservative Jewish-Christians in Jerusalem.

**(7) Endorsement of the Witness to the Gentiles (11:1–18)**

<sup>1</sup>The apostles and the brothers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. <sup>2</sup>So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him <sup>3</sup>and said, “You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.”

<sup>4</sup>Peter began and explained everything to them precisely as it had happened: <sup>5</sup>“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. <sup>6</sup>I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, reptiles, and birds of the air. <sup>7</sup>Then I heard a voice telling me, ‘Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.’

<sup>8</sup>“I replied, ‘Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’

<sup>9</sup>“The voice spoke from heaven a second time, ‘Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.’ <sup>10</sup>This happened three times, and then it was all pulled up to heaven again.

<sup>11</sup>“Right then three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea stopped at the house where I was staying. <sup>12</sup>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. <sup>13</sup>He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, ‘Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. <sup>14</sup>He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.’

<sup>15</sup>“As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. <sup>16</sup>Then I remembered what the Lord had said: ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ <sup>17</sup>So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?”

<sup>18</sup>When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, “So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life.”

**11:1–2** Peter had himself been convinced of God’s inclusion of the Gentiles. Now his fellow Jewish-Christians in Jerusalem needed convincing. The strongest reservations seem to have been entertained by a group of especially conservative Jewish Christians whom Luke called “those of the circumcision” (v. 2, NKJV; “circumcised believers,” NIV).<sup>11483</sup> These seem to be distinguished from the apostles and wider group of Judean

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<sup>47112</sup> It would later become a problem for Peter when the same conservative elements pressured him to withdraw from table fellowship with Gentiles in Antioch (Gal 2:11–13), a reminder that enough social pressure can thwart even the strongest convictions.

<sup>48113</sup> This is exactly the phrase (οἱ ἐκ περιτομῆς) used of the Jewish Christians from Joppa in 10:45, but there it simply means *circumcised* (i.e., Jewish) Christians. In 11:2 the group was distinguished from the Jewish Christians as a whole, and it seems to refer to a limited group within them.

brethren mentioned in v. 1.<sup>11494</sup> Evidently they represented a strongly Jewish perspective and felt that any Gentile who became a Christian would have to do so by converting to Judaism and undergoing full Jewish proselyte procedure, which included circumcision. Hence they were known as the circumcision group, since they would require it of all Gentile converts. They may well have been the same group as those believers mentioned in 15:5 who belonged to the Pharisees and required Gentiles to be circumcised and to live by the Mosaic law. Their perspective is understandable, given that at this point Christianity was still seen as a movement within Judaism. It followed that if Gentiles became Christians they also became Jews by so doing and should thus undergo the normal procedure for converts to Judaism. Needless to say, if this line had been adopted, there never would have been an effective Gentile mission. Most Gentiles had real problems with some of the more “external” aspects of the Jewish law, such as circumcision and the food laws. Such factors doubtless had kept many Gentiles like Cornelius, who believed in the God of the Jews, from becoming full proselytes.

**11:3–12** It is interesting that the circumcision group raised a question about Peter’s table fellowship with the Gentiles rather than about their being baptized. As has already been shown in the discussion of 10:9–16, the issues of table fellowship and acceptance of the Gentiles were closely related.<sup>11505</sup> Peter’s eating with the Gentiles showed his acceptance of them as fellow Christians, and they were still *uncircumcised* (v. 3). In any event, Peter’s response quickly led them to the *real* issue—God’s acceptance of the Gentiles. Luke basically summarized chap. 10, again using the device of repetition to underscore the significance of the event. The account contains only slight differences from the earlier one. It is considerably condensed, and Peter occasionally added a previously unmentioned detail. Naturally, Peter began with his own vision in 11:5–10, which is a detailed retelling of 10:9–16.<sup>11516</sup> In fact, that is the most extensive repetition in Peter’s report to Jerusalem. For Peter it was the heart of the matter. There are no unclean people. God accepts the Gentiles. Verses 11–12 summarize the narrative of 10:17–25, relating the arrival of the three messengers from Cornelius and Peter’s accompanying them to Caesarea. The most significant difference from the earlier account is the additional detail that there were six Christians from Joppa who accompanied Peter to Caesarea (v. 12). More than that—it was “these” six whom Peter

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<sup>49114</sup> The Western text provides a much lengthier version of v. 2, which has Peter carrying on an extensive preaching tour on the way back to Jerusalem after the conversion of Cornelius. See Bruce, *Acts*: NIC, 232, n. 2.

<sup>50115</sup> See also K. Haacker, “*Dibelius und Cornelius: Ein Beispiel formgeschichtlicher Überlieferungskritik*,” *BZ* 24 (1980): 240.

<sup>51116</sup> The most significant difference in 11:5–10 is the mention of a fourfold division of the animal world (θηρία), which follows Ps 148:10, rather than the threefold vision that appears in 10:12. Also in v. 10 the more colorful verb ἀνεσπάσθη is used for the “drawing up” of the sheet back into heaven rather than ἀνελήμφθη (“taken up”) of 10:16.



brought to Jerusalem as witnesses to what transpired in Cornelius's home (cf. 10:45).<sup>11527</sup>

**11:13–16** Verses 13–14 summarize the vision of Cornelius, how the angel instructed him to send to Joppa for Peter. Verse 14 is more specific than any of the accounts of Cornelius's vision in chap. 10. Peter was to bring a message to Cornelius "through which [he] and all [his] household [would] be saved." This expansion elucidates the reference to Peter's words in v. 22 and above all explains Cornelius's eager anticipation of Peter's message in 10:33. There was no need for Peter to summarize his sermon before the Jerusalem Christians, so he quickly moved to the coming of the Spirit on the Gentiles at Cornelius's house (v. 15). Peter noted how the event interrupted his sermon. He added that the Spirit came upon them just "as he had come upon us at the beginning." The comparison is to Pentecost. Peter made explicit here what was implicit in 10:46. He continued to draw the comparison in v. 16, which harks back to Acts 1:5 and Jesus' prediction of a baptism with the Holy Spirit. Jesus' prediction was fulfilled for the apostles at Pentecost; for Cornelius and his fellow Gentiles it was fulfilled with the coming of the Spirit at Cornelius's house. Certainly for Peter it was a Gentile Pentecost. He could hardly make more explicit comparisons!

**11:17–18** Peter concluded his report in Jerusalem by reminding his hearers once again that God gave the gift of the Spirit to the Gentiles and added, "Who was I to think that I could oppose God?" Once again he used the verb *kōlyō* in expressing the idea of opposition to God, just as he employed the same verb in 10:47 to question whether anyone could oppose the baptism of the Gentiles. Opposition to the Gentiles' baptism *would* be opposition to God, for God's leading of Peter and of Cornelius proved beyond doubt his intention to include them in his people. There really was not much the "circumcision group" could say now. God was clearly in it. Who could object? Silence quickly gave way to praise of God in his triumphant advance of the gospel. God had granted "repentance unto life" to the Gentiles.

Not all the problems were solved, however. Not all the Jewish Christians were satisfied with taking in Gentiles without circumcision. As yet there had been no mass influx of Gentiles, and the problems were not altogether evident. Things would change, particularly with the great success of Paul and Barnabas's mission among the Gentiles. Once again the issue would be raised by the more staunchly Jewish faction—"Shouldn't Gentiles be circumcised when they become Christians?" "Can we really have table fellowship with uncircumcised Gentiles who do not abide by the food laws?" (author's paraphrase). These issues would surface once more for a final showdown in the Jerusalem Conference of chap. 15.

#### **4. Antioch's Witness to Gentiles (11:19–30)**

Chapter 11 as a whole is devoted to the foundational events in the Gentile mission of the church. Two different churches play the primary roles. The Jerusalem church, led by the apostles and comprised mainly of Aramaic-speaking Jewish Christians, recognized the divine leading in Peter's witness to Cornelius and concluded that God intended to

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<sup>52117</sup> Cadbury and Lake see a possible significance in there being six witnesses. Peter made the seventh. Seven seals were often attached to official Roman documents such as wills. Cf. Rev 5:1. See *Beginnings* 4:126.

lead the Gentiles to repentance and life (11:1–18). The Antioch church, established by Hellenists, those Greek-speaking Jewish Christians who had to flee Jerusalem after the martyrdom of Stephen, began to put this principle into practice and to reach out to the Gentile population (11:19–30).

Antioch was a natural setting for the Gentile mission to begin in earnest. It was the third largest city in the Roman Empire, its population of some 500,000 to 800,000 only being exceeded by Rome and Alexandria.<sup>11538</sup> Founded in 300 b.c. by the first Seleucid ruler, Seleucus Nicator, it was from the first a “hellenistic city,” promoting Greek culture.<sup>11549</sup> Seleucus named the city Antioch for his father, Antiochus, and made it the capital of his empire. It was a planned city, carefully laid out in a grid pattern with streets positioned to assure maximum exposure to the cool afternoon breezes. Noted for its beauty, it was located in the large fertile plain of the Orontes River. In fact, the Orontes from the point it flowed into the Mediterranean was navigable some fifteen miles upstream where Antioch was located.<sup>12550</sup> At the mouth of the Orontes stood Antioch’s major port, the town of Seleucus, and at Antioch itself there was a significant harbor. From 64 b.c., Antioch came under Roman jurisdiction, being granted by the Roman general Pompey the status of “free city,” which allowed it a measure of self-jurisdiction and exemption from the provincial taxes. In 23 b.c. the areas of Syria, Cilicia, and Palestine were organized into the Roman “province of Syria” with Antioch as the seat of the imperial legate (governor).

Religiously, Antioch was an amalgam. Five miles from the city was a major cult center for the Greek goddess Daphne and her consort Apollo. The Antioch version of the cult seems to have been but a weak Hellenization of the worship of the ancient Assyrian goddess Astarte, in which sacred prostitution played a major role. This practice evidently continued because Antioch was notorious throughout the Roman Empire for its immorality. A typical statement is that of the satirist Juvenal who, in complaining about Rome’s degenerating morality, remarked that the “filth of the Orontes” had flowed into the Tiber (*Satire* 3.62). There was an extensive Jewish community in Antioch, its population in the first century a.d. being variously estimated from 25,000 to 50,000. Though some of the more Hellenized Jews may have participated in the larger

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<sup>53118</sup> For a thorough treatment of Antioch, see G. Downey, *A History of Antioch in Syria* (Princeton, N.J.: University Press, 1961) and his abridged version, *Ancient Antioch* (Princeton, N.J.: University Press, 1963). For treatments more focused on the early Christian community in Antioch, see W. Meeks and R. Wilcken, *Jews and Christians in Antioch* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars, 1978); R. E. Brown and J. P. Meier, *Antioch and Rome* (New York: Paulist, 1982), esp. 28–44.

<sup>54119</sup> The Seleucid (or Syrian) Empire, along with the Ptolemaic Empire in Egypt, was established by the Greek generals of Alexander the Great and dominated the Near East for two hundred years until both came under Roman dominion in the first century B.C.

<sup>55120</sup> One of Herod the Great’s major building projects was the lavish decorating of the main street that led through town to the harbor. He paved it with marble and erected colonnades on both sides.

government of the city, the Jewish community seems to have been accorded a separate identity within the city with a major degree of self-government.<sup>12561</sup>

Obviously, Antioch was a natural location for Christian witness. An extensive Jewish community was there, and the witness evidently began with them. The witness quickly spread to the Gentile majority, perhaps beginning naturally with Gentiles like Cornelius, who had already been attracted to the Jewish worship of God. Cosmopolitan center and port center that it was, it is not surprising that the Christians there caught the vision of an empire-wide mission. Paul would be the one who most carried it out, and Antioch was his sponsoring church.

The beginnings of all this are traced in 11:19–26. Verses 19–21 depict the establishment of the church at Antioch and the beginnings of its Gentile outreach. Verses 22–24 deal with the endorsement of the Antioch witness by the Jerusalem church through the bridge-figure of Barnabas. Verses 25–26 show the increase of the mission among the Gentiles through the efforts of Paul. Finally, vv. 27–30 illustrate the unity of the entire Christian community through all this as exemplified in Antioch's offering for Jerusalem in a time of famine.

### ***(1) Establishing a Church in Antioch (11:19–26)***

**<sup>19</sup>Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews. <sup>20</sup>Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. <sup>21</sup>The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.**

**<sup>22</sup>News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. <sup>23</sup>When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. <sup>24</sup>He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.**

**<sup>25</sup>Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, <sup>26</sup>and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.**

The Hellenists in Antioch (11:19–21)

**11:19–21** Verse 19 refers to the "Hellenists" and looks back to 8:1, repeating the verb "scattered" and reminding the reader of these Greek-speaking Jewish Christian associates of Stephen who had to flee Jerusalem as a result of his martyrdom. One of those who was "scattered" was Philip (8:4), and he witnessed to the Samaritans, an Ethiopian, and to the seacoast communities as far north as Caesarea (8:5–40). Another group of Hellenist refugees is described as evangelizing the seacoast towns further to the north, in the Phoenician plain, which extended some seventy-five miles along the coast of middle Syria from Mt. Carmel north to the river Eleutheros. Its principal cities

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<sup>56121</sup> See C. H. Kraeling, "The Jewish Community at Antioch," *JBL* 51 (1932): 130–60; S. E. Johnson, "Antioch, the Base of Operations," *LTQ* 18 (1983): 64–73.

were Ptolemais, Tyre, Sidon, and Zarephath.<sup>12572</sup> Others began work on the island of Cyprus, the easternmost island of the Mediterranean and some 100 miles off the Syrian coast. Paul and Barnabas would later continue the witness on Cyprus (13:4–12). Those who traveled farthest north arrived in Antioch. These coastal towns were all heavily Hellenized, and the Greek language would have been dominant. It was thus an appropriate area for witness by these Greek-speaking Hellenist Christians. Quite naturally, they witnessed at first to Jews only, probably to fellow Greek-speaking Jews, as Stephen had done in the Diaspora synagogues of Jerusalem (6:9). But at Antioch they took a bolder step and began preaching to Gentiles as well.<sup>12583</sup> This step was taken by those who were themselves Diaspora Jews from Cyrene and Cyprus. Perhaps the Lucius of Cyrene, who is described as one of the “prophets and teachers” at Antioch in 13:1, was one of these. Barnabas, who himself was a native of Cyprus, would later become active in this witness (cf. 4:36). Paul was a Diaspora Jew from Cilicia (cf. 22:3). It was only natural that a concern for evangelization of the Gentiles should be especially felt by the Jewish Christians of the dispersion who had grown up in a Gentile environment and had a more worldwide perspective than the more provincial Palestinian Christians. Their message also betrayed their sensitivity to Gentile concerns. They did not preach Jesus as the Messiah (Christ) but rather as Lord, a title far more familiar to Gentiles than Jewish messianic ideas.<sup>12594</sup> Their witness bore great results; a large number of the Gentiles believed and turned to the Lord (v. 21) because “the hand” of the Lord, that is, his power and Spirit, was with them, just as it had been so dramatically in the conversion of Cornelius.<sup>12605</sup>

Barnabas Sent by Jerusalem (11:22–24)

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<sup>57122</sup> For the later Christian communities in Tyre, Ptolemais, and Sidon, see Acts 21:3–7; 27:3.

<sup>58123</sup> “Greeks” is virtually equivalent to Gentiles. Cf. Paul’s frequent contrast of “Jew and Greek” (Gal 3:28). Several important manuscripts (B, D [the uncorrected D lacks the variant, though D corrected maintains this reading], E) have “Hellenists” instead of “Greeks,” but the context calls for Greeks/Gentiles whichever reading is followed. The Jews the Hellenists witnessed to (v. 19) were most likely fellow Greek-speakers. The contrast set up by the word  $\delta\epsilon$  in v. 20 calls for an advance beyond this, and that could only be Gentiles. Also the concern expressed in Jerusalem (v. 22) would imply a more radical witness than one to Greek-speaking Jews. For a contrary opinion, see P. Parker, “Three Variant Readings in Luke-Acts,” *JBL* 83 (1964): 165–70; D. R. Fotheringham, “Acts xi.20,” *ExpTim* 45 (1933–34): 430.

<sup>59124</sup> In its origin the title Lord was most likely applied to Jesus first in *Jewish* Christian circles, using the OT title for God (*Adonai/Maran*). But Messiah was a particularly meaningful title to Jews, and the frequency of its use ( $\chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\omicron\varsigma$ ) in the sermons to Jews in Acts testifies to this. “Lord” was a title used by Gentiles for rulers and cult gods and was more understandable to them. Note its frequent use in Gentile contexts in Acts. It was also Paul’s favorite title for Jesus in his Epistles, where “Christ” is more a proper name than a title. See *Beginnings* 5:357–62.

<sup>60125</sup> For God’s “hand” expressing his power, cf. Exod 9:3; 1 Sam 5:6; 6:9; Isa 59:1; 66:14; Ezek 1:3; Luke 1:66; Acts 4:30; 13:11.

**11:22** Jerusalem was the “mother church” for all Christians in those days. It was the church of the apostles, the link to Jesus. It was only natural for the Jerusalem church to show an interest in the total Christian witness wherever it was carried. This concern had already expressed itself in their sending Peter and John to Philip’s mission in Samaria (8:14–17) and their inquiring of Peter about his witness to Cornelius (11:1–18). It would reappear when Paul and Barnabas reported to Jerusalem on their successful Gentile mission (15:1–35). Although this could certainly be seen as a sort of “supervision” by Jerusalem, in each instance the Christians of Jerusalem enthusiastically endorsed the new work and gave it their stamp of approval. In this instance, when Jerusalem heard of the Gentile mission in Antioch, the church did not send apostles, as it did when Philip preached to Samaritans. Instead, they sent a nonapostolic delegate but a wise choice indeed—Barnabas, “the son of encouragement” (4:36).

**11:23–24** Barnabas had a natural relationship with the Hellenists. As a native of Cyprus, he most likely was fluent in Greek. On the other hand, he did not seem to have originally belonged to their group but rather to have had ties from the beginning with the non-Hellenist church in Jerusalem and particularly with the apostles. He participated in exemplary fashion in the church’s practice of sharing (4:36f.). He introduced Paul into the circle of apostles (9:27). He was chosen as their delegate to Antioch. Barnabas was a “bridge-builder,” one who was able to see the positive aspects in both sides of an issue and to mediate between perspectives. That was the sort of person needed now to investigate the new mission of the more adventurous Hellenists of Antioch and allay the concerns of the more conservative “circumcision” group in Jerusalem (cf. 11:2). Luke emphasized these positive qualities in Barnabas. “He was a good man” (v. 24), a phrase Luke used elsewhere only of Joseph of Arimathea (Luke 23:50). He was “full of the Holy Spirit and faith,” just like Stephen (Acts 6:5). When Barnabas arrived in Antioch, far from criticizing the new undertaking, he was able to see the grace of God at work in all the Gentile conversions, and he rejoiced (v. 23).<sup>12616</sup> More than that, he encouraged them in the ministry, thus living up to his nickname of being the “Son of Encouragement” (4:36). This quality of encouragement, of looking for the best in others, would reappear when Barnabas interceded on Mark’s behalf (15:36–40).

People like Barnabas are always needed by the church. They are the peacemakers, the go-betweens who seek no glory for themselves but only seek to bring out the best in others. But “would-be” Barnabases of today need to heed a further lesson from this outstanding biblical figure. Barnabases want everyone to be happy, but sometimes it simply is not possible to please everyone without serious compromise of one’s basic convictions. Barnabas found that out later at Antioch when, in order to placate the conservative Jewish Christians “from James” (Jerusalem), he withdrew from table fellowship with those very Gentile-Christian converts we see him here witnessing to so enthusiastically (Gal 2:11–13).

Paul and Barnabas in Antioch (11:25–26)

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<sup>61126</sup> There is a Greek wordplay in the words “grace” (χάρις) and “joy” (χαρά). Coming from the same root, the relationship is obvious: one who experiences *grace* is filled with *joy*.

**11:25–26** With the growing missionary success in Antioch, Barnabas needed help; and Paul immediately came to mind. Paul was in the area of his native Cilicia (cf. Acts 9:30; Gal 1:21), to which he had departed after his first visit to Jerusalem following his conversion. The text of Acts is compressed and selective, but the most likely reconstruction of Pauline chronology from Gal 1–2 would indicate that some ten years or so had elapsed from the time he first departed from Cilicia to when Barnabas set out to find him. The verb Luke employed (*anazēteō*) means *to seek out* and implies he had some difficulty in finding him. Quite likely Paul was off somewhere busily engaged in missionary activity. When Barnabas finally located Paul, he brought him back to Antioch where the two were heavily occupied in preaching and teaching to “great numbers” (v. 26). Likely they particularly continued the witness to Gentiles. This would prepare them for their first mission together in Cyprus and southern Turkey (13:4–14:26). Luke appended the interesting note to v. 26 that the term “Christian” was first applied to disciples in Antioch. This may be of more significance than might appear on first sight. The term only occurs in two other places in the New Testament (Acts 26:28; 1 Pet 4:16). In all three instances it is a term used by outsiders to designate Christians. Evidently the term was not originally used by Christians of themselves. They preferred terms like “believers, disciples, brothers.” The first extensive usage by a Christian writer to designate fellow believers was by Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, around the turn of the second century. The term (*Christianoī*) consists of the Greek word for Christ/Messiah (*Christos*) with the *Latin* ending *ianus*, meaning *belonging to, identified by*. Examples of similar formations are *Herodianoī*, partisans of Herod, and *Augustianoī*, the zealous followers of Nero.<sup>12627</sup> The term was often used by Roman writers to designate followers of Christ.<sup>12638</sup> The early usage in Antioch is perhaps indicative of two things. For one, it is the sort of term Gentiles would have used and perhaps reflects the success of Antioch’s Gentile mission. Gentiles were dubbing their fellow Gentiles who became followers of Christ “Christians.” Second, it reflects that Christianity was beginning to have an identity of its own and no longer was viewed as a totally Jewish entity. Again, the success among Gentiles would have hastened this process in Antioch. How is one to relate the two “Gentile missions” of Acts 10–11, that is, Peter’s and that of the Antioch church? In all likelihood the two overlapped in time, with the Antioch witness covering several years. On all appearances the Antioch mission involved much greater numbers (cf. v. 21). And certainly it was the Antioch church that was the great “Gentile mission” church in sponsoring Paul’s missionary activity. Peter did not follow up his conversion of Cornelius by a personal mission to the Gentiles. All indications are that he continued primarily to witness to the Jews (cf. Gal 2:7). Still, the experience with Cornelius was essential. It convinced the leading apostle of the legitimacy of the Gentile

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<sup>62127</sup> Most commentators are in agreement that the term was first applied to Christians by outsiders. For an opposing view, which sees it as first used by Christians as a self-designation, see H. B. Mattingly, “The Origin of the Name Christiani,” *JTS* 9 (1958): 26–37; E. J. Bickerman, “The Name of Christians,” *HTR* 42 (1949): 109–24; C. Spicq, “Ce que signifie le titre de Chretien,” *ST* 15 (1961): 68–78.

<sup>63128</sup> Cf. Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.64; Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44; Pliny, *Epistles* 10.96–97; Lucian, *Alexander* 25.38.

mission, and he in turn became its prime advocate with the other apostles and the Jerusalem church (cf. 11:1–18; 15:7–11). In a real sense it paved the way with the church as a whole for Paul’s mission to the Gentiles.

## **(2) Sending Famine Relief to Jerusalem (11:27–30)**

**<sup>27</sup>During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. <sup>28</sup>One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) <sup>29</sup>The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea. <sup>30</sup>This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.**

**11:27–30** Verses 27–30 conclude the Antioch narrative with the tradition of a relief offering sent by the Antioch church to Jerusalem during a time of severe famine. Here we are first introduced to the prophet Agabus. He had the gift of foretelling,<sup>12649</sup> and the gift was again manifested in 21:10–11, when he prophesied in a graphic way Paul’s impending arrest in Jerusalem. He is said to have been among a group of prophets who came from Jerusalem to Antioch. There is ample evidence for such early Christian prophets, and they seem to have largely been itinerant, as the present passage would indicate.<sup>13650</sup> In Antioch Agabus predicted that there would be a worldwide famine.<sup>13661</sup> Luke added the “aside” that this famine did indeed occur during the time of Claudius, who was Roman emperor from a.d. 41–54.<sup>13672</sup>

The reign of Claudius was in fact marked by a long series of crop failures in various parts of the empire—in Judea, in Rome, in Egypt, and in Greece. The Judean famine seems to have taken place during the procuratorship of Tiberius Alexander (a.d. 46–48),

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<sup>64129</sup> Christian prophets are mentioned also in Acts 13:1; 15:32. Cf. Philip’s prophesying daughters (21:9). Paul ranked prophets second only to apostles in his list of those gifted by the Spirit (1 Cor 12:28). The gift of prophecy is treated throughout 1 Cor 14 and is primarily valued for its role in edification and encouragement. The Jews believed that prophecy had ceased during the time of the exile but would return with the coming of the Messiah. Peter’s quote of Joel at Pentecost reflected his conviction that the gift had been poured out on the Christian community (cf. 2:17–18) and was indeed a sign of the Messiah’s coming. In the NT prophecy is primarily viewed as a word spoken under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit intended for the direction or edification of the Christian community. Inspiration was normative to the experience but not necessarily the ability to predict future events. In this sense Agabus’s gift was unusual.

<sup>65130</sup> Itinerant prophets existed as late as the second-century church (cf. *Didache* 11:7–12).

<sup>66131</sup> NIV has “entire Roman world” for the Greek οἰκουμένη, meaning *inhabited, civilized world*, which in that day was virtually the “Roman world.”

<sup>67132</sup> Luke’s concern for *world* history is illustrated by the fact that he was the only NT writer to mention a Roman emperor by name. Claudius was the only one Luke mentioned more than once (here and in 18:2). See F. F. Bruce, “Christianity under Claudius,” *BJRL* 44 (1962): 309–26.

and Egyptian documents reveal a major famine there in a.d. 45–46 due to flooding.<sup>13683</sup> The most likely time for the Judean famine would thus seem to have been around a.d. 46.<sup>13694</sup> In any event, the Antioch church decided to gather a collection to relieve their fellow Christians in Judea, each setting something aside according to his or her ability.<sup>13705</sup> Eventually, when the famine struck, the collection was delivered to the elders in Jerusalem by Paul and Barnabas.<sup>13716</sup> Actually, v. 30 does not mention Jerusalem, but 12:25 does in speaking of Paul and Barnabas's return from this visit.

The subtle transition in the leadership of the Jerusalem church throughout these chapters is noteworthy. In the early days of the Jerusalem church, the apostles had taken responsibility for matters of charity (cf. 4:34–5:11). A transition seems to have begun with the selection of the seven Hellenists (6:1–6). Paul and Barnabas laid the gift

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<sup>68133</sup> K. S. Gapp argued that failures in Egypt and Judea would put severe supply-and-demand pressures through large parts of the empire, creating higher prices and a “famine” in a real sense for the poorer classes (“The Universal Famine under Claudius,” *HTR* 28 [1935]: 258–65).

<sup>69134</sup> F. F. Bruce, “Chronological Questions in the Acts of the Apostles,” *BJRL* 68 (1986): 278–79.

<sup>70135</sup> Note how much Paul's own collection for the Jerusalem church fit the Antioch pattern. The same Greek term for “ministry,” “help,” or “service” is used in Acts 11:29 and in 2 Cor 8–9. Each is to set something aside regularly (cf. 1 Cor 16:1–4) and to give according to his or her means (cf. 2 Cor 8:11–12).

<sup>71136</sup> How is one to reconcile the visits of Paul after his conversion as recorded in Acts and in Galatians? If one equates Gal 2:1–10 with the “circumcision” conference of Acts 15, which content suggests as the most natural course, then the “collection visit” of Acts 11:27–30 becomes a “third” visit, whereas Galatians only mentions two. Innumerable “solutions” to the problem have been offered. Bruce (*Acts*: NIC, 244) suggests that Acts 11:27–30 and Gal 2:1–10 refer to the same (“second”) visit and that Galatians was written prior to the Acts 15 conference; so also Marshall, *Acts*, 200 and D. R. de Lacey, “Paul in Jerusalem,” *NTS* 20 (1973): 82–86, and (in somewhat modified form that allows for Galatians coming after the Acts 15 conference) C. Talbert, “Again: Paul's Visits to Jerusalem,” *NovT* 9 (1967): 26–40. A number of scholars see Acts 11:27–30 as a doublet of Acts 15 (P. Benoit, “La deuxième visite de Saint Paul à Jerusalem,” *Bib* 40 [1959]: 778–92; Pesch, *Apostelgeschichte* 1:356). Jeremias also took the doublet approach but with the added nuance that he saw the famine as aggravated by A.D. 47–48's being a sabbatical year and thus extending into the spring of A.D. 49, when he believed the Acts 15 conference took place (“Sabbathjahr und neutestamentliche Chronologie,” *ZNW* 27 [1928]: 98–103). A number of recent scholars argue that Acts 11:27ff. is wholly due to Lukan redaction: e.g., G. Strecker, “Die sogenannte zweite Jerusalemreise des Paulus (Act. 11:27–30),” *ZNW* 53 (1962): 67–77. An often overlooked solution recognizes the polemical nature of Galatians, where Paul was listing only those times when he had contact with the apostles in Jerusalem. Since this was not evidently the case with the collection from Antioch, he simply overlooked that “visit.” See J. Polhill, “Galatia Revisited, the Life-Setting of the Epistle,” *RevExp* 69 (1972): 443–47.



from Antioch at the feet of “the elders.” Evidently the apostles were giving themselves more and more to the word, like Peter on his mission tours in Samaria and along the coast. More and more responsibility would be assumed by these lay elders, based almost surely on the pattern of the elders in the Jewish synagogue. Paul would organize his own churches along the same pattern (cf. 14:23; 20:17).<sup>13727</sup>

### **5. Persecution Again in Jerusalem (12:1–25)**

After the glimpse at the Antioch church, attention focused once more on Jerusalem in chap. 12. If the apostles had remained largely untouched by the persecution that followed Stephen’s death, the situation radically changed when Herod Agrippa assumed rule over Judea. The apostles then became the specific target of the king’s efforts to suppress the Christians. James was beheaded, and Peter was put in prison in anticipation of the same fate. But not even the king was able to stem the tide when God was behind it. Indeed, the king found himself fighting against God and suffered the consequences (cf. 5:39; 11:17).

The whole story is told in one of the most delightful and engaging narratives in all of Acts. The villainy of Herod is established in vv. 1–5 with his execution of James and arrest of Peter. His designs were thwarted in the latter instance, however, when God delivered Peter in a miraculous manner (vv. 6–19). Peter’s escape is told in two scenes, both related with consummate artistry. The first scene pictures the angel delivering Peter from jail (vv. 6–11). It has a vivid, almost comic touch; the angel had to prompt the groggy Peter every step of the way. One can almost hear Peter telling the story: “I tell you, I was completely out of it. It was all God’s doing. I thought I was having a particularly pleasant dream.” The second scene is no less entertaining, as Peter hastened to the house of John Mark’s mother (vv. 12–19a). There is again a comic touch (with Rhoda leaving him knocking at the gate) and also a decidedly dramatic effect. Would he get inside before Herod’s men discovered his escape and came after him? The story was still not over. There was a final deliverance of the apostles, as God dealt with their persecutor, Herod, in a definitive manner (vv. 19b–23). Once more at peace, the witness of the church prospered (vv. 24–25). The whole story of the deliverance of the apostles from Herod’s clutches is bracketed by references to Paul and Barnabas’s delivery of the Antioch relief offering (11:30; 12:25). It is the last narrative in Acts that deals exclusively with the apostles and the Jerusalem church. From this point on, whenever Jerusalem was involved, it would be in connection with Paul’s ministry. Peter and his fellow apostles faded into the background, and Paul took center stage.

#### **(1) Herod Agrippa’s Persecution of the Apostles (12:1–5)**

**<sup>1</sup>It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. <sup>2</sup>He had James, the brother of John, put to**

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<sup>72137</sup> In v. 28 the Western text adds at the beginning “when we were gathered together.” It is most unlikely that this variant is authentic. Some scholars, however, find it “irresistible” since it would allow for Luke’s own presence in Antioch and lend still further support to the ancient tradition that Luke came from that city and is perhaps even the same as the Lucius of Cyrene of Acts 13:1. See E. Delebecque, “Saul et Luc avant le premier voyage missionnaire,” *RSPT* 66 (1982): 551–59.

death with the sword. <sup>3</sup>When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. <sup>4</sup>After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover.

<sup>5</sup>So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.

**12:1** The story begins with a vague time reference. It was “about this time.” Evidently Luke meant about the time the Antioch church was preparing its relief offering for the Jerusalem church (11:27–30). Considering the history of Herod Agrippa I, the Herod of this story, the time most likely would have been the spring of a.d. 42 or 43.<sup>13738</sup> The Greek of v. 1 is quite vivid: Herod “laid violent hands” on some of the Christians. To understand why he would do this, it is necessary to understand something of Herod Agrippa I and his relationship to the Jews. Agrippa was the grandson of Herod the Great. His father, Aristobulus, had been executed in 7 b.c. by his grandfather for fear that he might usurp his throne. After his father’s death, while still a child, Agrippa was sent to Rome with his mother, where he was reared and educated along with the children of the Roman aristocracy. These childhood friendships eventually led to his ruling over a Jewish kingdom nearly the extent of that of his grandfather. In a.d. 37 the emperor Caligula gave him the title of king and made him ruler over the territories formerly ruled by his uncle Philip, lands in the Transjordan and the Ten Cities (Decapolis) north of Galilee. In a.d. 39 Caligula extended Agrippa’s rule by giving him Galilee and Perea, the territory of his uncle Antipas, who had been sent into exile. Finally, when his former schoolmate Claudius became emperor in a.d. 41, he was given rule of Judea and Samaria, which had been under Roman procurators for thirty-five years. He was truly “king of the Jews” now, ruling over all of Judea, Samaria, Galilee, the Transjordan, and the Decapolis.

Though king, Agrippa was hardly secure. Much of his good fortune was due to his friendship with Caligula, and Caligula had not been a popular emperor with the Romans. In fact, Agrippa could not count on always being in the good graces of Rome. It became all the more important for him to win the loyalty of his Jewish subjects in order to give him at least a firm footing at home. Everything Josephus said about Agrippa<sup>13749</sup> would indicate that he made every attempt to please the Jews, particularly currying the favor of the influential Pharisees. His “Jewishness,” however, seems to have been largely a face he put on when at home. When away, he lived in a thoroughly Roman fashion.<sup>14750</sup> Why persecution of the Christians was particularly pleasing to them at this time is not stated.

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<sup>73138</sup> Bruce, “Chronological Questions,” 276–78.

<sup>74139</sup> For Agrippa sections see Josephus, *Ant.* 18.126, 131–34, 143–69, 179–204, 228–301; 19.236–44, 265, 274–77, 288, 292–354. See Bruce, *Acts: NIC*, 246–47.

<sup>75140</sup> For Agrippa’s Roman lifestyle, see P. Gaechter, “Hatred of the House of Annas,” *TS* 8 (1947): 23–29.

Perhaps the acceptance of uncircumcised Gentiles as related in chap. 11 had something to do with their disfavor.<sup>14761</sup>

**12:2** Agrippa began his persecution of the Christians by having James killed “with a sword.” This James is described as “brother of John” and thus was the apostle, the son of Zebedee. Some interpreters have suggested that his brother John was also executed at this time, interpreting Mark 10:39 as a prediction that both would be martyred. John 21:23, however, seems to predict the opposite; and early church tradition has John living to an old age and dying a natural death.<sup>14772</sup> If Herod executed James in the Roman fashion “with the sword,” he was beheaded. If he used the Jewish mode of execution, which forbade beheading as a desecration to the body, he had “the edge of the sword” thrust through his body.<sup>14783</sup> The martyrdom of James is told with the utmost brevity.<sup>14794</sup> Luke did not want to dwell on it but used the incident to set the stage for his main emphasis—God’s deliverance of Peter.

**12:3–5** Having won points with the Jews by the execution of James, Agrippa then moved against the chief of the apostles, Peter, arresting him and placing him in prison. Luke noted that it was the Feast of the Unleavened Bread. Herod would not risk his favor with the Jews by executing Peter during this time, since that would be considered a desecration. The Passover was eaten on the eve of Nisan 14 and was followed by seven days of eating unleavened bread, ending on Nisan 21. Luke used the term “Passover” for the entire period. It would have been after the holy days had ended that Agrippa would have brought Peter forth for public trial and surely also for execution (v.

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<sup>76141</sup> For the suggestion that the incident over Caligula’s statue in A.D. 40 may have produced increased Jewish zealotism, which was behind the persecution of the Christians, see J. W. Swain, “Gamaliel’s Speech and Caligula’s Statue,” *HTR* 37 (1944): 341–49.

<sup>77142</sup> Cf. Irenaeus, *Haer*, 2.22.5. Evidence for John’s martyrdom is sparse and quite late—the ninth-century George the Sinner and fifth-century Philip of Side. See *Beginnings* 4:133–34.

<sup>78143</sup> Cf. Deut 13:15; 1 Sam 22:18f.; 2 Sam 1:13, 15 (implied, but not explicitly mentioned); Jer 26:23. See J. Blinzler, “Rechtsgeschliches zur Hinrichtung des Zebedaiden Jakobus (Apg. xii.2),” *NovT* 5 (1962): 191–206. Blinzler also argues that the Jewish king never had the right of capital punishment in religious matters and that Agrippa must have been carrying out the order of the Sanhedrin. Apparently the OT practice was to behead after execution (1 Sam 17:46, 51; 31:9; 2 Kgs 10:6–8). This was clearly desecration of a body. Whether it was forbidden in OT times is another question.

<sup>79144</sup> A later tradition, which should be taken with considerable reservation, tells of how the officer who led James to trial was converted by James’s testimony, professed his faith, and was himself condemned and executed together with James (Eusebius, *Eccl.Hist.* 2.9.2f., quoting Clement of Alexandria). For the view that James’s zealous nature (“son of thunder,” cf. Luke 9:54f.) made him a political threat to Agrippa, see O. Cullmann, “Courants Multiples dans la Communauté Primitive: A Propos du Martyre de Jacques fils de Zébédée,” *RSR* 60 (1972): 55–68.

4).<sup>14805</sup> Peter was placed under heavy security, being guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. This was the usual Roman practice, changing guards every three hours throughout the twelve night hours to assure maximum alertness.<sup>14816</sup> Why the heavy guard? Perhaps the Sanhedrin had informed Agrippa of their own experience in jailing the apostles on a previous occasion (5:19). While Peter waited in prison, the Christians used their most effective means of assistance. They prayed continually for him (v. 5).

**(2) Peter's Miraculous Deliverance from Prison (12:6–19a)**

**<sup>6</sup>The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance.**

**<sup>7</sup>Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. "Quick, get up!" he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrists.**

**<sup>8</sup>Then the angel said to him, "Put on your clothes and sandals." And Peter did so. "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me," the angel told him. <sup>9</sup>Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision. <sup>10</sup>They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him.**

**<sup>11</sup>Then Peter came to himself and said, "Now I know without a doubt that the Lord sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches and from everything the Jewish people were anticipating."**

**<sup>12</sup>When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying.**

**<sup>13</sup>Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer the door. <sup>14</sup>When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, "Peter is at the door!"**

**<sup>15</sup>"You're out of your mind," they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, "It must be his angel."**

**<sup>16</sup>But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. <sup>17</sup>Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. "Tell James and the brothers about this," he said, and then he left for another place.**

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<sup>80145</sup> A number of scholars see a "Passover deliverance" motif in the story of Peter's escape from prison. There are Jewish traditions that God particularly used Passover eve as the time to deliver his people. Certain phrases in Acts 12 are seen to echo the Passover narrative of Exodus: cf. "the night before" (12:6; Exod 12:12), "quick, get up" (12:7; Exod 12:11), "put on your ... sandals" (12:8; Exod 12:11), "the Lord has rescued" (Acts 12:11; Exod 18:4, 8–10). For a full development see J. Dupont, *Nouvelles Etudes*, 338–41; A. Strobel, "Passa Symbolik und Passa-wunder in Act. xii.3ff., *NTS* 4 (1958): 210–15.

<sup>81146</sup> H. Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, trans. J. Limburg, A. Kraabel, and D. Juel, *Her* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 93.

**<sup>18</sup>In the morning, there was no small commotion among the soldiers as to what had become of Peter. <sup>19</sup>After Herod had a thorough search made for him and did not find him, he cross-examined the guards and ordered that they be executed.**

**12:6–8a** The story of Peter’s deliverance begins with the notice that it was the night before Peter’s trial. This heightens its dramatic impact. It was the last minute before the sealing of the apostle’s doom. Peter is described as sleeping, bound with two chains, each fastened to a guard, one on his right and one on his left.<sup>14827</sup> The other two guards of the squadron of four stood watch at the doors of the prison. Perhaps one stood at each of the two inner gates of the prison (cf. v. 10).<sup>14838</sup> That Peter could sleep so soundly the night before his trial is perhaps indicative of his calm assurance that he was in God’s hands. It may also reflect that the guards were asleep on either side of him. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared,<sup>14849</sup> and a flash of heavenly light filled the cell.<sup>15850</sup> Peter was still fast asleep, and the angel had to arouse him, perhaps with a kick in the ribs. Still not fully alert, Peter really had no idea what was happening. The angel had to direct every single movement of the apostle: “get up”; “put your coat on”; “tie your sandals”; “follow me.” Obviously, this was not Peter’s *escape*. It was rather his *deliverance*. Peter was totally passive throughout the entire incident.

**12:8b–11** Peter dutifully followed the angel’s direction. Still half-asleep, he imagined that he was having some sort of vision (v. 9). With a pronounced dramatic tone, each step of their progress was noted. They safely passed the first sentry guarding the inner gate to the cell. Perhaps a “deep sleep from the Lord” had fallen upon the guards (cf. 1 Sam 26:12). Suspense mounted: Would they make it past the rest of the guard? They passed the second gate safely and then came to the outer gate that led into the city, a forbidding iron barrier.

Most likely the place of Peter’s confinement was the Tower of Antonia, where the Roman troops were barracked. Located at the northeastern corner of the temple complex, its eastern entrance led into the streets of the city. Even this formidable iron barrier proved no hindrance to Peter and the angel, opening of its own accord and allowing their safe passage.<sup>15861</sup> The angel led Peter down the length of the first street

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<sup>82147</sup> For the Roman practice of chaining prisoners to their guards, cf. Seneca, *Epistles* 5.7. See also Schneider, *Apostlegeschichte* 2:104. Agrippa himself had earlier been a prisoner in Rome and was at that time chained to a guard (Josephus, *Ant.* 18.196).

<sup>83148</sup> *Beginnings* 4:135.

<sup>84149</sup> There is a close parallel to the angel’s sudden appearance to the shepherds in the Western and Byzantine traditions of Luke 2:9 (cf. KJV): καὶ ἰδοὺ ἄγγελος κυρίου ἐπέστη.

<sup>85150</sup> A number of interpreters see “angel” in its general sense of “messenger” and argue that a human deliverer worked an “inside job” in freeing Peter. Such details as the flash of light and “automatic” opening of the iron gate (v. 10) tell strongly against this. A heavenly messenger also delivered the apostles in 5:17–23, and a miraculous deliverance of Paul and Silas is told in 16:25f.

<sup>86151</sup> The automatic opening of gates is found elsewhere in Greco-Roman literature. Josephus, *War* 6.293 described the miraculous opening of the massive iron eastern gate of the temple on one occasion at midnight. For similar “automatic openings, cf.

from the prison. Perhaps coming to a corner and allowing Peter to turn into a side street and out of sight of the prison and having delivered the apostle to safety, the angel disappeared. Only then did Peter come to full alertness and realize that God had indeed delivered him from Herod's clutches and his anticipated death (v. 11).<sup>15872</sup>

**12:12** The scene shifts to the Christian community who had been praying fervently for Peter (vv. 12–17). One group had gathered at the home of John Mark's mother, and Peter headed there.<sup>15883</sup> It is unusual that Mary was identified through Mark; usually the child was identified by the parent. The reason possibly is that Mark was the better known of the two in Christian circles, or it may be that there were several prominent women named Mary in the early church. They were perhaps distinguished by their children. John Mark would soon play a significant role in the first missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas (12:25; 13:5, 13; 15:37, 39).<sup>15894</sup>

**12:13–14** The scene at Mary's house is played out in a delightful fashion with the servant-girl Rhoda as the main character. Rhoda was a common Greek name, often borne by servants and meaning *rose*. When Peter arrived, he stood at the outer gate that entered into the courtyard. Rhoda probably was responsible for keeping the gate, a task often delegated to female servants (cf. John 18:16f.). Responding to Peter's knocking, she hurried out to the gate and discovered who was there. For all her joy, she ran back into the house to announce the good news, forgetting altogether that Peter would really like to have come in. This heightened the suspense all the more. Peter did not need to be standing outside in the street, exposed to possible recapture. "Peter is at the door!" Rhoda announced excitedly, interrupting the prayers of the Christians who had gathered there. "No, it can't be," they replied; "it must be his angel."

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Euripides' *Bacchae* 443–48, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 3.695f., and Homer's *Iliad* 5.749. See Talbert, *Acts*, 52–53.

<sup>87152</sup> Peter's description of the Lord's deliverance uses the same language employed throughout the OT for God's deliverance of Israel in the exodus from Egypt (particularly the verb ἐξαίρέω). See W. Radl, "Befreiung aus dem Gefängnis," *BZ* 27 (1983): 89.

<sup>88153</sup> The specific mention of Mark and his mother Mary indicates they were well-known to the larger Christian community. The text contains no warrant for the speculative assumption that Mary's home was the scene of the last supper and/or the upper room where the disciples gathered before Pentecost. That Mary retained her home, and a sizable one at that with its outer courtyard and servants, is a further example that the Jerusalem church's practice of sharing was voluntary and not communal ownership. That the community gathered there and made free use of it, however, is testimony that "no one claimed any of his possessions were his own" (4:32); they shared freely.

<sup>89154</sup> Though Paul eventually quarreled with Mark (15:37, 39), he was evidently later reconciled to him and mentioned him as a trusted coworker in his later epistles (Col 4:10; 2 Tim 4:11; Phlm 24). In 1 Pet 5:13, Mark was with Peter in Rome (Babylon) and was affectionately called "son" by the apostle. Early tradition ascribed the Gospel of Mark to him, noting that it was based on the reminiscences of Peter. It has sometimes been suggested that he was the "young man" who fled Gethsemane in Mark 14:51f. and that this was his "signature" to his Gospel, but this is not provable. For the early traditions on Mark, see Eusebius, *Church History* 2.151.1–16; 3.39.14–16; 5.8.3; 6.14.6.

**12:15–16** This response reflects the Jewish belief that each person has a guardian angel as his or her spiritual counterpart.<sup>15905</sup> It was believed that one’s angel often appeared immediately after the person’s death, and that idea may lurk behind the response to Rhoda. “You’ve seen his ghost,” we would say. Such a reply is remarkable coming from a group that had been totally occupied in prayer for Peter’s deliverance. They found it easier to believe that Peter had died and gone to heaven than that their prayers had been answered. In any event, who could trust a hysterical servant girl? “You’re crazy,” they said. Some things are just too good to be true (cf. Luke 24:11). But it was true, and Peter’s persistent knocking finally got a response (v. 16).

**12:17** Verse 17 is a key verse. Basically, it gives three pieces of information: (1) Peter’s report of his miraculous delivery, (2) his instruction to tell the news to James, and (3) his departure to “another place” where he would find refuge from the wrath of Agrippa. The first item is exactly what one would expect under the circumstances. That Peter had to motion them to silence<sup>15916</sup> in order to share his story is indicative of the excited hubbub created by his totally unexpected presence. The second item, though seemingly incidental, is actually a keynote for the subsequent text of Acts. The James who was to be informed of Peter’s deliverance was James the oldest of Jesus’ brothers, who from this point on assumed the leadership of the church in Jerusalem (cf. 15:13–21; 21:18).<sup>15927</sup> It is interesting that “the brothers” are to be informed along with James. Perhaps this refers to the elders, who were assuming an increasing role in the governance of the Jerusalem church (cf. 11:30). The other apostles are not mentioned. At this time they may have been absent from Jerusalem, having taken refuge from Agrippa’s persecution. The third piece of information in v. 17 has perhaps provoked more scholarly attention than it deserves, largely due to the tradition that the “other

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<sup>90155</sup> The popular idea of a guardian angel is found in extrabiblical literature such as Tobit 5:4–16. The biblical evidence for such an idea, however, is scant. Passages that are cited for the idea generally deal with a protecting group of angels, not one’s “personal” guardian (cf. Ps 91:11; Luke 16:22; Matt 18:10; Heb 1:14). See E. F. Harrison, *Interpreting Acts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 204.

<sup>91156</sup> For this gesture of motioning a crowd to silence in order to address them, cf. 13:16; 21:40; 26:1.

<sup>92157</sup> For James’s relationship to Jesus, see Chap. I, n. 47. James is listed among Jesus’ brothers in Mark 6:3. Paul attested to the prominence of James in the Jerusalem church (Gal 1:19), listing him along with Peter and John as one of its “pillars” (Gal 2:9) and showing the strong influence he had even over Peter and Barnabas (Gal 2:12f.). Paul listed him among those to whom the risen Jesus appeared (1 Cor 15:7), and he is the traditional author of the Epistle of James. For a characterization of his leadership and the tradition of his martyrdom, see the commentary on 21:17–26.

place” to which Peter went was Rome.<sup>15938</sup> Luke evidently did not consider the place all that important and did not specify where it was. The point is simply that he had to go elsewhere to find safety from Agrippa. Later, after Herod’s death, he was back in Jerusalem (15:7). That Peter went to Rome at this early date is most unlikely, and Paul’s Epistle to the Romans seems to speak against it (15:20).

**12:18–19a** The final scene in the story of Peter’s escape returns to the prison (vv. 18–19a). When the guards awoke in the morning, they found no one attached to their chains and likely no evidence of an escape other than the obvious fact that Peter was not there. After interrogating the guards and failing to locate Peter, Agrippa had the guards executed. This was in accordance with Roman law, which specified that a guard who allowed the escape of a prisoner was to bear the same penalty the escapee would have suffered.<sup>15949</sup> Agrippa had every intention of subjecting Peter to the same fate as James.

### **(3) Herod’s Self-Destructive Arrogance (12:19b–23)**

**Then Herod went from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there a while. <sup>20</sup>He had been quarreling with the people of Tyre and Sidon; they now joined together and sought an audience with him. Having secured the support of Blastus, a trusted personal servant of the king, they asked for peace, because they depended on the king’s country for their food supply.**

**<sup>21</sup>On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. <sup>22</sup>They shouted, “This is the voice of a god, not of a man.” <sup>23</sup>Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died.**

**12:19b–20** There are two climaxes to the account of Agrippa’s persecution. One is Peter’s escape from his clutches. The other is Agrippa’s own grisly fate. Chronologically, his death came anywhere from several months to a year after Peter’s escape, but the Christians viewed it very much as a divine retribution for what they had suffered under the king.<sup>16950</sup> Josephus also gave an account of Agrippa’s death (*Ant.* 19.343–52) which,

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<sup>93158</sup> For Rome as the “other place,” see J. Wenham, “Did Peter Go to Rome in A.D. 42?” *TB* 23 (1972): 94–102. Antioch has often been suggested as well as the Mesopotamian Diaspora (R. E. Osborne, “Where Did Peter Go?” *CJT* 14 [1968]: 274–77). For the unlikely view that Peter was actually martyred at this time and that the “other place” means *beyond this earth*, see D. F. Robinson, “Where and When Did Peter Die?” *JBL* 64 (1945): 255–67 and W. M. Smaltz, “Did Peter Die in Jerusalem?” *JBL* 71 (1952): 211–16.

<sup>94159</sup> The Roman Code of Justinian 9.4.4. The Greek literally says that Agrippa commanded that the guards be “led away,” ἀνάγω, but that verb is often used euphemistically for execution.

<sup>95160</sup> The chronological question turns on the particular occasion when Agrippa made his oration in Caesarea (v. 21). If it was at the games held in Caesarea every five years, it would have been in March A.D. 44 when Agrippa was struck dead. Since the Passover came later than that in A.D. 44, Peter’s escape would have been Passover of A.D. 43. The occasion could have been the celebration of the emperor’s birthday in August. In



though going into greater detail, is very much in agreement with the narrative in Acts. Josephus and Acts both set the event in Caesarea (Acts 12:19b). Josephus did not mention the quarrel with the Phoenician coastal cities of Tyre and Sidon. Evidently it was some sort of economic war in which Agrippa had the upper hand, since these coastal towns were indeed totally dependent for their food on the inland territories Agrippa ruled (v. 20).<sup>16961</sup> We know nothing more of Blastus. He is described as being the king's "chamberlain," or "personal servant." As a trusted servant, he was evidently able to gain the king's ear on the matter and negotiate for a settlement suitable to the Tyrians and Sidonians. Blastus was likely given some "financial consideration" by them in exchange for his role as mediator.

**12:21–23** Verse 21 describes Agrippa as appearing before the people "on the appointed day." Josephus specified that it was the day of a festival in honor of Caesar. Evidently the king chose this as the occasion for formally concluding the agreement with Tyre and Sidon. Josephus also went into greater detail on the "royal robes" worn by Agrippa. The garment was made of silver and glistened radiantly in the morning sun. As Herod, in all his glory, turned and addressed the people, they shouted, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man" (v. 22). Josephus recorded a like response from the people, who hailed Herod as a god and "more than mortal." Josephus at this point added significant detail, noting that Herod neither affirmed nor denied the people's ascription of divinity to him. Then, looking up, he saw an owl. On an earlier occasion, when imprisoned in Rome, he had seen a vision of an owl; and a fellow prisoner told him it was the harbinger of good fortune for him. That had indeed proved true, for he was released and eventually became king of the Jews. The same prisoner, however, had warned him that if he ever again saw an owl, he would have but five days to live (*Ant.* 18.200). Josephus added that he was immediately stricken with pain and carried to his bed chamber, and he died exactly five days later. Luke's account also speaks of an immediate death, making explicit what is implicit in Josephus—he was struck down by "an angel of the Lord." Once again we see a motif already familiar in Acts. There is both mercy and judgment with the Lord. The Spirit blessed the faithful Christians with miraculous works and great growth (5:12–16). The same Spirit brought judgment to Ananias and Sapphira (5:1–11). The Lord's angel delivered Peter from mortal danger (12:6–17). The Lord's angel struck Agrippa dead for all his arrogance (12:20–23). He did not "give praise to God"—neither in his acceptance of the people's blasphemous acclamation nor in his persecution of God's people. Josephus spoke of acute pain in Agrippa's abdomen. Luke said that he was "eaten by worms."<sup>16972</sup>

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that event Peter would have been arrested in the spring (Passover) of A.D. 44 with Herod dying the summer of the same year. See *Beginnings* 5:446–52.

<sup>96161</sup> The OT attests to this dependency. Cf. 1 Kgs 5:11; Ezek 27:17. M. Strom notes the parallel between the judgment that was spoken against the pride of the king of Tyre in Ezek 28 and the fate that befell Agrippa ("An Old Testament Background to Acts 12, 20–23," *NTS* 32 [1986]: 289–92).

<sup>97162</sup> The same word is used of worm-eaten crops. Neither Josephus nor Acts provides sufficient detail to make a proper medical diagnosis. Many suggestions have been offered—a ruptured appendix, arsenic poisoning, or tapeworms (see E. M. Merrins, "The

#### **(4) Peace for the Church (12:24–25)**

**<sup>24</sup>But the word of God continued to increase and spread.**

**<sup>25</sup>When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark.**

**12:24** With Agrippa's sudden removal, the persecution of the church ended, and once more the word of God flourished. The Greek says literally that it "grew and multiplied," just as the seed that fell on good ground in Jesus' parable of the sower. This is the last summary of the Jerusalem church in Acts. It ends on a positive note. God continued to bless the witness of the Jerusalem community.

**12:25** Verse 25 moves the narrative forward, mentioning the return of Paul and Barnabas to Antioch on completion of their mission of delivering the famine relief offering (11:30). Viewed chronologically, it would have most likely been around this time, around a.d. 46 and thus a couple of years after the death of Agrippa, that the famine struck Judea and Antioch sent its offering.<sup>16983</sup> The best manuscripts read "to," not "from," Jerusalem, but that would scarcely make sense. Clearly, the two were returning from Jerusalem to Antioch and were set for the following narrative, which took place in Antioch (13:1–3). The NIV has chosen, as most translations do, to follow the more poorly attested reading "from Jerusalem," since the context seems to demand it. Another solution, however, is to put the phrase "to Jerusalem" with "ministry," a construction found elsewhere in Luke-Acts. The translation would then read, "Barnabas and Saul returned, having finished their ministry to Jerusalem."<sup>16994</sup> In any event, they took a companion along with them—John Mark (cf. 12:12). The church at Antioch would soon send the three of them on a mission (13:1–3) that would result in tremendous success among the Gentiles. The witness to Judea and Samaria had now been well-established. The way to the Gentiles had already been paved by Philip, by Peter, and by the church at Antioch. From this point it would be Paul who above all would take up the Gentile witness and move the gospel to "the ends of the earth."<sup>100</sup>

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Deaths of Antiochus IV, Herod the Great, and Herod Agrippa I," *BibSac* 61 [1904]: 561f). As his title suggests, those former villains of Jewish history, Antiochus Epiphanes and Herod the Great, also died in a "worm-eaten" state according to Josephus.

<sup>98163</sup> See Bruce, *Acts: NIC*, 257; also Harrison, *Acts*, 208f.

<sup>99164</sup> This is argued convincingly by J. Dupont, "La Mission de Paul à Jerusalem' (Actes 12, 25)," *NovT* 1 (1956): 275–303.

<sup>100</sup> John B. Polhill, *Acts*, vol. 26, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 251–286.