



Presenting Peter Who is this man called Peter?

Wednesday Night Crew Summer Series

Presenting PETER: A study in Mark and the Letters of Peter

Come Join Pastor Orleen and the Wednesday Night Crew this Summer beginning 6/9th

Who is this man whom Jesus Loved&Corrected&Taught&Trusted & Rebuked & Gave the Leadership of His Church to?

WEEK #1: Power in a name: Simon Peter. Social, Economic, Family Culture. What was it like to live life in Peter's neighborhood? What did this Family Culture ADD to the nascent, embryonic, incipient Church?

WEEK #2: Peter in the Gospels – The Confession "LORD, I am a sinful man!" & Walking with Jesus – Confessing Him as Messiah

WEEK #3: The Passover, The Prophecy & The Reinstatement

WEEK #4: Matthais, Pentecost, Abuse: Ananias&Sapphira

WEEK 5

Peter in Leadership

Matthew 16:19

"I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth is already bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth is already loosed in heaven."

Peter in Leadership: Getting the Message of Christ the Messiah out of Israel

The Samaritans (bitter enemies of the Jews)

Believed in the authoritative Pentateuch (still difference) & some religious customs

Seen Mount Gerizim as the sacred mount Abraham nearly sacrificed Isaac, etc.

Seen as religious "hybrids" by the Jews

I. Peter in Leadership: SAMARITANS

a.) [Woman at the Well – John 4/First missionary]

Disciples find Him at the well and asking Him where He gets His nourishment from:

John 4:35-38 (Acts 8:5 Philip goes to Samaria in the diaspora)

"Don't you say, 'There are still four more months, then comes the harvest'? Listen to what I'm telling you: Open your eyes and look at the fields, for they are ready for harvest. ³⁶ The reaper is already receiving pay and gathering fruit for eternal life, so the sower and reaper can rejoice together. ³⁷ For in this case the saying is true: 'One sows and another reaps.' ³⁸ I sent you to reap what you didn't labor for; others have labored, and you have benefited from their labor."

Acts 8:8; 13:52; 16:34; Lk 1:14, 44, 58; 10:17, 21; 24:52

[Woman at the Well – John 4/First missionary

³⁹ Now many Samaritans from that town believed in Him because of what the woman said when she testified, "He told me everything I ever did." ⁴⁰ Therefore, when the Samaritans came to Him, they asked Him to stay with them, and He stayed there two days. ⁴¹ Many more believed because of what He said. ⁴² And they told the woman, "We no longer believe because of what you said, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this really is the Savior of the world."]

b.) Acts 8:4-8; 14-17

Philip in Samaria

⁴ So those who were scattered went on their way preaching the message of good news. ⁵ Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah to them. ⁶ The crowds paid attention with one mind to what Philip said, as they heard and saw the signs he was performing. ⁷ For



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unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed, and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. ⁸ So there was great joy in that city.

¹⁴ When the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had welcomed God's message, they sent Peter and John to them. ¹⁵ After they went down there, they prayed for them, so the Samaritans might receive the Holy Spirit. ¹⁶ For He had not yet come down on any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷ Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

Peter and John being commended by Paul as supporting his ministry to the Gentiles in **Galatians 2:9**; Acts 8:14-17 "Samaritan Pentecost"

II. Peter in Leadership: THE CORNELIUS AFFAIR

Conversion of Cornelius (unit = the Italian Cohort)

Italian Cohort, Italian Band. Roman military unit to which the centurion Cornelius belonged. The single biblical reference is in Acts 10:1. The Roman army included auxiliary cohorts or regiments, most of which seem to have comprised provincial subjects apart from Jews (who were exempted). Such units were sometimes referred to by distinctive names like "Italian" or "Augustan" (Imperial) (Acts 27:1). The Italian Band was evidently composed mainly of those who not only were Roman citizens but had been born in Rome. The bands were divided into 10 centuries of 100 men, each commanded by a centurion (in this instance, Cornelius). Inscriptions indicate that such an Italian regiment had indeed been stationed in Syria during AD 69–157. This does not rule out an earlier presence in the province; military records are simply not available.¹

Luke recounts this story THREE TIMES **Acts 10; 11:1-18; 15:1-29**

Acts 9:43

And Peter stayed on many days in Joppa with Simon, a leather tanner.

- Peter did observe the dietary restrictions expect of all Jews **Acts 10:14** "No, Lord!" Peter said. "For I have never eaten anything common and ritually unclean!"
Lev 11 (Clean and Unclean eating)
- Peter stayed in the house of a Tanner
- Profession of Tanner – The profession is makes you ritually unclean because of the daily contact with animal hides.
- A Pharisee would not stay in this house, not even have contact with the tanner.
- Peter seems to be "freer" than that at this time. Luke's way of opening the door to what will be coming in Peter's life with Cornelius, The Roman Centurion.
- Luke wants us to know the Centurion is attached to Rome.
- It is here in this house where he receives the vision to go to the Centurion.
[Would he have received this vision if he could not get himself to accept the hospitality of a tanner? Did this act of obedience open the door for the vision?]

Jesus has taught Peter and now these two divinely taught men are about to collide!

¹ Elwell, W. A., & Beitzel, B. J. (1988). [Italian Cohort, Italian Band](#). In *Baker encyclopedia of the Bible* (Vol. 1, p. 1076). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.



Presenting Peter
Who is this man called Peter?

Not only do we get to see Peter’s development, we are watching the Church be born and grow. As we go, ask yourself how does this parallel your own personal growth AND How does it parallel church growth.

Acts 10

Cornelius’s Vision

10 There was a man in Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment. ² He was a devout man and feared God along with his whole household. He did many charitable deeds for the Jewish people and always prayed to God.

- Was stationed in Caesarea, a city named for Augustus Caesar. A centurion was a Roman army officer in charge of 100 soldiers. Luke wants us to know this. **WHY?**
[This **Roman army officer**, although stationed in Caesarea, would probably have had to return soon to Rome. **Thus his conversion may have helped to spread the gospel to the empire’s capital city.** Because of frequent outbreaks of violence, Roman soldiers had to be stationed to keep peace throughout Israel. But most Romans, hated as conquerors, did not get along well in the nation. As an army officer, **Cornelius** was in a difficult position. He represented Rome, but he lived in Caesarea. During Cornelius’s years in Israel, he had been conquered by the **God of Israel**. With a reputation as a **devout man**, Cornelius was respected by the Jews. Cornelius’s faith had hands—he was regularly involved in activities that displayed his interest in serving others.]
- God Fearers = Gentiles who acknowledge the God of Israel and observe many of the commandments of the Torah.
- Cornelius is ready for what?
How has he gotten ready to know more?
Who has taught him?

³ About three in the afternoon he distinctly saw in a vision an angel of God who came in and said to him, “Cornelius!”

⁴ Looking intently at him, he became afraid and said, “What is it, lord?”

The angel told him, “Your prayers and your acts of charity have come up as a memorial offering before God. ⁵ Now send men to Joppa and call for Simon, who is also named Peter. ⁶ He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea.”

An Angel of God appears to Cornelius at 3PM, the time for the Tamid (perpetual burnt offering)

Acts 3:1

WORD WEALTH

28:30 continually, *tamid* (tah-meed); Strong’s #8548: Constantly, always, evermore, perpetually. It is assumed that this adverb comes from a root, meaning **“to stretch out to eternity,”** “to extend forever.”

- *Tamid* occurs more than 100 times in the OT with the primary idea of something permanent and unceasing.

In 29:42, *tamid* describes the burnt offering as “continual”; “permanent,” “daily,” or “regular” may also fit here. *Tamid* occurs in several well-loved verses:

- “My eyes *are ever* toward the LORD” (**Ps. 25:15**).
- “His praise *shall continually* be in my mouth” (**Ps. 34:1**).
- “The LORD will guide you **continually**, and satisfy your soul in drought” (**Is. 58:11**).²

² Hayford, J. W. (Ed.). (1997). *Spirit filled life study Bible* (electronic ed., Ex 28:15). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.



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⁷ When the angel who spoke to him had gone, he called two of his household slaves and a devout soldier, who was one of those who attended him. ⁸ After explaining everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.

- Cornelius was directed to Joppa (thirty-two miles south of Caesarea) to find Peter.
- **10:7–8** Cornelius obeyed the message of the angel and sent his most trusted aides to get Peter. Three men were sent—**two household servants** and a **devout soldier**, the latter of whom is described as **one of his personal attendants**. Obviously, the godly character of Cornelius had made an impact on those closest to him. The word used to describe Cornelius’s account of **what had happened** is the word from which we get the term “exegesis” (*exegesamenos*), meaning to “explain” clearly and in detail.

WHO ARE MY “CLOSEST TO ME” THAT I AM IMPACTING?

Peter’s Vision

⁹ The next day, as they were traveling and nearing the city, Peter went up to pray on the housetop about noon. ¹⁰ Then he became hungry and wanted to eat, but while they were preparing something, he went into a visionary state. ¹¹ He saw heaven opened and an object that resembled a large sheet coming down, being lowered by its four corners to the earth. ¹² In it were all the four-footed animals and reptiles of the earth, and the birds of the sky. ¹³ Then a voice said to him, “Get up, Peter; kill and eat!”

¹⁴ “No, Lord!” Peter said. “For I have never eaten anything common and ritually unclean!”

¹⁵ Again, a second time, a voice said to him, “What God has made clean, you must not call common.” ¹⁶ This happened three times, and then the object was taken up into heaven.

- Note the 3X Peter is asked (connection with his 3X denials and restoration?)
[Simon, son of John, do you love me? **Jn 21:15-17**]
- Houses typically had flat roofs, enabling a person to escape the heat of a small, crowded house and to enjoy cool breezes as well as privacy and quiet.
- Often daily work was done on the roofs.
- The Jews had strict regulations about what could and could not be eaten, and Peter had never eaten what a Jew considered an unclean animal (see Lev. 10, Clean vs. Unclean).
- The sheet, however, contained a variety of animals, both clean and unclean. By repeating the vision of the sheet three times, God underscored the importance of His message to Peter (Acts 10:16).

Peter Visits Cornelius

¹⁷ While Peter was deeply perplexed about what the vision he had seen might mean, the men who had been sent by Cornelius, having asked directions to Simon’s house, stood at the gate. ¹⁸ They called out, asking if Simon, who was also named Peter, was lodging there.

¹⁹ While Peter was thinking about the vision, the Spirit told him, “Three men are here looking for you. ²⁰ Get up, go downstairs, and accompany them with no doubts at all, because I have sent them.”

[Peter does not get the meaning of the visions until he meets Cornelius. He must step out into what the LORD is asking of him.]



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²¹ Then Peter went down to the men and said, “Here I am, the one you’re looking for. What is the reason you’re here?”

²² They said, “Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who has a good reputation with the whole Jewish nation, was divinely directed by a holy angel to call you to his house and to hear a message from you.” ²³ Peter then invited them in and gave them lodging. The next day he got up and set out with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa went with him. ²⁴ The following day he entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. ²⁵ When Peter entered, Cornelius met him, fell at his feet, and worshiped him.

²⁶ But Peter helped him up and said, “Stand up! I myself am also a man.” ²⁷ While talking with him, he went on in and found that many had come together there. ²⁸ Peter said to them, “You know it’s forbidden for a Jewish man to associate with or visit a foreigner. But God has shown me that I must not call any person common or unclean. ²⁹ That’s why I came without any objection when I was sent for. So I ask: Why did you send for me?”

³⁰ Cornelius replied, “Four days ago at this hour, at three in the afternoon, I was praying in my house. Just then a man in a dazzling robe stood before me ³¹ and said, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard, and your acts of charity have been remembered in God’s sight. ³² Therefore send someone to Joppa and invite Simon here, who is also named Peter. He is lodging in Simon the tanner’s house by the sea.’ ³³ Therefore I immediately sent for you, and you did the right thing in coming. So we are all present before God, to hear everything you have been commanded by the Lord.”

Good News for Gentiles

³⁴ Then Peter began to speak: “Now I really understand that God doesn’t show favoritism, ³⁵ but in every nation the person who fears Him and does righteousness is acceptable to Him. ³⁶ He sent the message to the Israelites, proclaiming the good news of peace through Jesus Christ—He is Lord of all. ³⁷ You know the events that took place throughout Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John preached: ³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were under the tyranny of the Devil, because God was with Him. ³⁹ We ourselves are witnesses of everything He did in both the Judean country and in Jerusalem, yet they killed Him by hanging Him on a tree. ⁴⁰ God raised up this man on the third day and permitted Him to be seen, ⁴¹ not by all the people, but by us, witnesses appointed beforehand by God, who ate and drank with Him after He rose from the dead. ⁴² He commanded us to preach to the people and to solemnly testify that He is the One appointed by God to be the Judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³ All the prophets testify about Him that through His name everyone who believes in Him will receive forgiveness of sins.”

Gentile Conversion and Baptism

⁴⁴ While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came down on all those who heard the message. ⁴⁵ The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. ⁴⁶ For they heard them speaking in other languages and declaring the greatness of God.

Then Peter responded, “Can anyone withhold water and prevent these people from being baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay for a few days.



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“Only the acknowledged authority invested in Peter and the extraordinary events surrounding the episode save the day for Gentile freedom.”

Why did Jesus spend so much time on developing Peter’s character?

- Because growth is continual.
- And when growth confronts you, what are you going to do with it?

10:45–48 Those of the circumcision were the orthodox Jews (v. 45). The Jews were “astonished” when the Gentiles received the Holy Spirit because they would not have expected God to bless these who were outside the covenant. With the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the Gentiles began to “speak with tongues” (the ability to speak in languages never studied, see Acts 2:2–4, note) and to “magnify” God (Acts 10:46). Speaking in other languages offered proof to the Jews that the Gentiles had received the Holy Spirit, since this was the same sign that God had given to the Jews on Pentecost. Peter immediately baptized them and stayed in their household for “a few days” to nurture them in their new faith (v. 48).

Possibly Peter knew that it was easier for him to accept this new Gentile openness to the gospel because he had been present at the “Samaritan Pentecost” (8:15–17).

[Step by Step Training: Jesus was still teaching and training via the Holy Spirit]

Peter in Leadership: Faltering

- Peter Backsteps/Falters
Peter, after opening the “door of faith to the Gentiles,” was admonished by Paul when his behavior did not exemplify grace

Acts 10:15 *Again, a second time, a voice said to him, “What God has made clean, you must not call common.”*

Galatians 2:11–18

¹¹ But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face because he stood condemned. ¹² For he regularly ate with the Gentiles before certain men came from James. However, when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, because he feared those from the circumcision party. ¹³ Then the rest of the Jews joined his hypocrisy, so that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. ¹⁴ But when I saw that they were deviating from the truth of the gospel, I told Cephas in front of everyone, “If you, who are a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel Gentiles to live like Jews?”

¹⁵ We who are Jews by birth and not “Gentile sinners” ¹⁶ know that no one is justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ. And we have believed in Christ Jesus so that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no human being will be justified. ¹⁷ But if we ourselves are also found to be “sinners” while seeking to be justified by Christ, is Christ then a promoter of sin? Absolutely not! ¹⁸ If I rebuild the system I tore down, I show myself to be a lawbreaker.

- It is hard to live detached from the status quo. PEER PRESSURE
- It is hard to separate ourselves from our culture
- It is hard to be confronted by growth

FOR ALL: Do I include myself in ALL [Lesser than thoughts? Bigoted thoughts?]

Romans 8:32

*He did not even spare His own Son but offered Him up for us **all**; how will He not also with Him grant us everything?*

Jesus Christ did not die on the Cross exclusively for one group but for all (**John 1:29; Rom. 8:32**).



Presenting Peter Who is this man called Peter?

The Church Leadership wrapping their heads around the move of the Holy Spirit Acts 11 - Gentile Salvation Defended

11 The apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles had welcomed God's message also. ² When Peter went up to Jerusalem, those who stressed circumcision argued with him, ³ saying, "You visited uncircumcised men and ate with them!" [DO NOT CONTAMINATE ME!]
*⁴ Peter began to explain to them in an **orderly sequence**, [TESTIFY] saying: ⁵ "I was in the town of Joppa praying, and I saw, in a visionary state, an object that resembled a large sheet coming down, being lowered by its four corners from heaven, and it came to me. ⁶ When I looked closely and considered it, I saw the four-footed animals of the earth, the wild beasts, the reptiles, and the birds of the sky. ⁷ Then I also heard a voice telling me, 'Get up, Peter; kill and eat!'*
⁸ "'No, Lord!' I said. 'For nothing common or ritually unclean has ever entered my mouth!'" ⁹ But a voice answered from heaven a second time, 'What God has made clean, you must not call common.'
*¹⁰ "Now this happened three times, and then everything was drawn up again into heaven. ¹¹ At that very moment, three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea arrived at the house where we were. ¹² Then the Spirit told me to accompany them with no doubts at all. **These six brothers accompanied me**, and we went into the man's house. ¹³ He reported to us how he had seen the angel standing in his house and saying, 'Send to Joppa, and call for Simon, who is also named Peter. ¹⁴ He will speak a message to you that you and all your household will be saved by.'*
*¹⁵ "As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came down on them, just as on us at the beginning. ¹⁶ Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' ¹⁷ **Therefore, if God gave them the same gift that He also gave to us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, how could I possibly hinder God?"***
*¹⁸ **When they heard this they became silent. Then they glorified God, saying, "So God has granted repentance resulting in life even to the Gentiles!"***

The Church in Antioch

*¹⁹ Those who had been scattered as a result of the persecution that started because of Stephen made their way as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, speaking the message to no one except Jews. ²⁰ But there were some of them, Cypriot and Cyrenian men, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Hellenists, proclaiming the good news about the Lord Jesus. ²¹ The Lord's hand was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord. ²² Then the report about them was heard by the church that was at Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to travel as far as Antioch. ²³ When he arrived and saw the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged all of them to remain true to the Lord with a firm resolve of the heart, ²⁴ for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And large numbers of people were added to the Lord. ²⁵ Then he went to Tarsus to search for Saul, ²⁶ and when he found him he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught large numbers. **The disciples were first called Christians at Antioch.***

11:26 Many Jews who lived **outside Palestine (known as Diaspora Jews)** settled in Antioch, the first place where believers in Christ were called "Christians." What started as a nickname became a means of identifying those who lived and behaved like Christ.

Famine Relief

²⁷ In those days some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. ²⁸ Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and predicted by the Spirit that there would be a severe famine throughout the Roman world. This took place during the time of Claudius. ²⁹ So each of the disciples, according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brothers who lived in Judea. ³⁰ They did this, sending it to the elders by means of Barnabas and Saul.



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- Peter “disappears” from Acts

Acts 12:17-19

¹⁷ Motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he explained to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. “Report these things to James and the brothers,” he said. Then he departed and went to a different place.

¹⁸ At daylight, there was a great commotion among the soldiers as to what could have become of Peter. ¹⁹ After Herod had searched and did not find him, he interrogated the guards and ordered their execution. Then Herod went down from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there.

III. Peter in Leadership: THE JERUSALEM COUNCIL

Outline the process of church growth and development in the early church.

Is there a parallel to how we grow as individuals?

Is it the same today?

Jerusalem Council

Acts 15:1-

Dispute in Antioch

¹⁵ Some men came down from Judea and began to teach the brothers: “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom prescribed by Moses, you cannot be saved!” ² But after Paul and Barnabas had engaged them in serious argument and debate, the church arranged for Paul and Barnabas and some others of them to go up to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem concerning this controversy.

15:1 These **men** were of a group called the Judaizers (see comments on 15:5).

They came **from Judea** (perhaps from Jerusalem) to Antioch; they held the opinion that Gentiles could not be saved **unless** they kept **the ancient Jewish custom of circumcision taught by Moses**.

Pharisees (like Paul was)

15:5 These Christians had been **Pharisees before their conversion** (like Paul). They found themselves having compatible views with Christianity because Pharisees believed in resurrection and in a Messiah, but many were reluctant to accept anyone who did not adhere to the oral tradition of law in addition to the Scriptures (Torah). Since only God knows the human heart, it is impossible to make a blanket statement regarding the eternal “destination” of this group. Probably some were sincere believers in the resurrection of Christ and his claim to be the Messiah (though obviously confused about the relationship between law and grace). Others likely were blindly trusting in their own moralistic efforts to make them acceptable to God. Still others may have been infiltrators with evil motives. Whatever these believers’ individual status before God, the common concern of all in the Judaizer camp was that all Gentile converts **be required to follow the law of Moses**, especially regarding circumcision.

³ When they had been sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, explaining in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and they created great joy among all the brothers.

⁴ When they arrived at Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church, the apostles, and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them. ⁵ But some of the believers from the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, “It is necessary to circumcise them and to command them to keep the law of Moses!”



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The Jerusalem Council

⁶ Then the apostles and the elders assembled to consider this matter. ⁷ After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them: “Brothers, you are aware that in the early days God made a choice among you,^[a] that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the gospel message and believe. ⁸ And God, who knows the heart, testified to them by giving the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us. ⁹ He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith. ¹⁰ Now then, why are you testing God by putting a yoke on the disciples’ necks that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear? ¹¹ On the contrary, we believe we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus in the same way they are.”

¹² Then the whole assembly fell silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul describing all the signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. ¹³ After they stopped speaking, James responded: “Brothers, listen to me! ¹⁴ Simeon has reported how God first intervened to take from the Gentiles a people for His name. ¹⁵ And the words of the prophets agree with this, as it is written:

*¹⁶ After these things I will return
and rebuild David’s fallen tent.*

*I will rebuild its ruins
and set it up again,*

*¹⁷ so the rest of humanity
may seek the Lord—
even all the Gentiles*

*who are called by My name,
declares the Lord who does these things,
¹⁸ known from long ago.*

¹⁹ Therefore, in my judgment, we should not cause difficulties for those among the Gentiles who turn to God, ²⁰ but instead we should write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from eating anything that has been strangled, and from blood. ²¹ For since ancient times, Moses has had those who proclaim him in every city, and every Sabbath day he is read aloud in the synagogues.”

The Letter to the Gentile Believers

*²² Then the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, decided to select men who were among them and to send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas: Judas, called Barsabbas, and Silas, both leading men among the brothers. ²³ They wrote this letter to be delivered by them:
From the apostles and the elders, your brothers,
To the brothers among the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia:
Greetings.*

²⁴ Because we have heard that some without our authorization went out from us and troubled you with their words and unsettled your hearts, ²⁵ we have unanimously decided to select men and send them to you along with our dearly loved Barnabas and Paul, ²⁶ who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

²⁷ Therefore we have sent Judas and Silas, who will personally report the same things by word of mouth. ²⁸ For it was the Holy Spirit’s decision—and ours—to put no greater burden on you than these necessary things:²⁹ that you abstain from food offered to idols, from blood, from eating anything that has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. You will do well if you keep yourselves from these things. Farewell.



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The Outcome of the Jerusalem Letter

³⁰ Then, being sent off, they went down to Antioch, and after gathering the assembly, they delivered the letter.

RESULTS:

³¹ When they read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement. ³² Both Judas and Silas, who were also prophets themselves, encouraged the brothers and strengthened them with a long message. ³³ After spending some time there, they were sent back in peace by the brothers to those who had sent them.

³⁵ But Paul and Barnabas, along with many others, remained in Antioch teaching and proclaiming the message of the Lord.

NotES:

ACTS 9:43 Peter stayed in the seaport city of Joppa “many days” and disciplined the new believers. During this time, he lived in the house of Simon, a tanner of animal skins. Peter’s stay in the house of a tanner is interesting, since handling dead animals in order to tan their skin was considered by the Jews a profession ceremonially “unclean.” For some reason, Peter disregarded these strict Jewish laws, perhaps as part of God’s preparation for his Gentile mission at Caesarea. **During his stay in Simon’s house, Peter experienced a vision from God concerning clean and unclean food (see Acts 10:9–16).**

10:1 Cornelius, a centurion, was stationed in Caesarea, a city named for Augustus Caesar. A centurion was a Roman army officer in charge of 100 soldiers. Cornelius was kind to the Jewish people; and although he was a Gentile, he worshiped God. Through Peter’s gospel presentation, Cornelius became a follower of Jesus Christ. Peter baptized Cornelius, the first Gentile convert, and Cornelius’s conversion marked the beginning of Gentile missionary activity.

10:10–16 While staying at the home of Simon the tanner in Joppa, Peter went up to the housetop to pray at midday. Houses typically had flat roofs, enabling a person to escape the heat of a small, crowded house and to enjoy cool breezes as well as privacy and quiet. Often daily work was done on the roofs. The Jews had strict regulations about what could and could not be eaten, and Peter had never eaten what a Jew considered an unclean animal (see Lev. 10, Clean vs. Unclean). The sheet, however, contained a variety of animals, both clean and unclean. By repeating the vision of the sheet three times, God underscored the importance of His message to Peter (Acts 10:16).

10:28 Extreme prejudice existed between Jews and Gentiles in biblical days. Jews referred to Gentiles as dogs, considered them unclean, and would have little to do with them. No orthodox Jew would enter the house of a Gentile, much less sit down at his table to eat. **Peter’s vision of the clean and unclean animals convinced him that, just as there is no clean or unclean animal flesh, so no human being should be considered clean or unclean.** Through God’s revelation, Peter recognized that Jesus Christ had died for all people.

I cannot be called anything else than what I am, a Christian.

St. Perpetua

Being a Christian is not doing certain things but doing everything a certain way.

Mary Crowley

RACIAL RELATIONS: NO RESPECTER OF PERSONS

The task of each Christian is twofold—**to proclaim the gospel and to love her neighbor.** Jesus Christ demonstrates that racial relations must be based on love (Mark 2:15–17; 7:25–30) and that the gospel is intended for all races, tribes, and nations (Luke 2:32; Rev. 14:6).



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The Bible does not contain any clear definition of race, referring instead to nations, tribes, tongues, and peoples. Yet racial prejudices appear to be intolerable. The Lord showed His displeasure by disciplining Miriam for her criticism of Moses' Ethiopian wife (Num. 12:1–15). Jonah was disciplined when he refused to take his ministry to those of another culture (Jon. 1:12). **Peter, after opening the “door of faith to the Gentiles,” was admonished when his behavior did not exemplify grace (Acts 10:15; Gal. 2:11–18).** We must avoid the idea that God approves any mistreatment according to race.

The Bible contains no justification that the people of one race are superior to those of another. Eve is called the “mother of all living” (Gen. 3:20), and all are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26, 27). All people are under the power of sin and are sinners, and everyone falls short of the glory of God and needs redemption (Rom. 3:23). Jesus Christ did not die on the Cross exclusively for one group but for all (**John 1:29; Rom. 8:32**). God does not respect persons according to their outward status or condition, and neither should His children (Luke 6:43–45; James 2:1).

The evaluative question must be, “Would God be pleased with the way I treat those of other races?” As ambassadors of Christ, believers must exemplify His standard of love for all people (2 Cor. 5:20; John 15:12).

See also Mal. 2:11; Acts 10:9–43; notes on Equality (Gal. 3); Evangelism (Matt. 28; John 6; Col. 4; 1 Pet. 3); Missions (Acts 1; 1 Cor. 9); Prejudice (Acts 15)

10:45–48 Those of the circumcision were the orthodox Jews (v. 45). The Jews were “astonished” when the Gentiles received the Holy Spirit because they would not have expected God to bless these who were outside the covenant. With the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the Gentiles began to “speak with tongues” (the ability to speak in languages never studied, see Acts 2:2–4, note) and to “magnify” God (Acts 10:46). Speaking in other languages offered proof to the Jews that the Gentiles had received the Holy Spirit, since this was the same sign that God had given to the Jews on Pentecost. Peter immediately baptized them and stayed in their household for “a few days” to nurture them in their new faith (v. 48).

11:22 Barnabas (lit. “son of encouragement”) was sent to Antioch. He was a generous man who earlier sold his material possessions and gave the money to the Jerusalem church (Acts 4:36). He was sent by the Jerusalem church to verify and guide this radical church growth among the Gentiles. Barnabas was the man responsible for bringing Paul to Antioch, and he later accompanied Paul on his first missionary journey (Acts 13:1–3; see map, Paul's First Missionary Journey).

11:26 Many Jews who lived **outside Palestine (known as Diaspora Jews)** settled in Antioch, the first place where believers in Christ were called “Christians.” **What started as a nickname became a means of identifying those who lived and behaved like Christ.**

11:28 Agabus was a prophet (Gk. *prophetes*, lit. “proclaimer” or “interpreter” or “one who speaks for”). Prophets had an important ministry in the early church and were held in high esteem. They not only told the future, but they also revealed the will of God. Agabus visited the church at Antioch and predicted a universal famine, which happened a decade later. As a result, the church at Antioch began a famine relief program for the congregation in Jerusalem.³

ACTS 10

CORNELIUS CALLS FOR PETER / 10:1–8

In the history of the early church recorded in the first nine chapters of Acts, this saving work of God's Spirit was mostly confined to the Jews. Suddenly, Acts 10 describes the Spirit's sovereign activity in a Gentile army officer stationed on the Mediterranean coast. The book of Acts continues with its steady, singular message: **God is directing the expansion of his church, founded on the crucified and resurrected Christ.** The conversion of

³ Thomas Nelson, I. (1995). *The Woman's Study Bible* (Ac 9:43–11:28). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.



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Cornelius, the first Gentile convert recorded in Acts, portrays a significant step in the process of expansion. The word was spreading and the church was on the threshold of a whole new phase of Jesus' promised progress (1:8). **10:1–2** This **Caesarea**, sometimes called Palestinian Caesarea, was located on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, thirty-two miles north of Joppa. The largest and most important port city on the Mediterranean in Palestine, **Caesarea was the capital of the Roman province of Judea. This was the first city to have Gentile Christians and a non-Jewish church.**

This **Roman army officer**, although stationed in Caesarea, would probably have had to return soon to Rome. Thus his conversion may have helped to spread the gospel to the empire's capital city. Because of frequent outbreaks of violence, Roman soldiers had to be stationed to keep peace throughout Israel. But most Romans, hated as conquerors, did not get along well in the nation. As an army officer, **Cornelius** was in a difficult position. He represented Rome, but he lived in Caesarea. During Cornelius's years in Israel, he had been conquered by the **God of Israel**. With a reputation as a **devout man**, Cornelius was respected by the Jews. Cornelius's faith had hands—he was regularly involved in activities that displayed his interest in serving others.

10:3–4 The time—**about three o'clock**—was likely one of Cornelius's regular times of prayer. This was one of the hours of prayer at the Temple. Cornelius may have prayed faithfully for many years before this day when **an angel of God** came to speak to him. Later, Cornelius would describe this angel as "a man in dazzling clothes" (10:30). Even this veteran soldier was terrified. God saw Cornelius's sincere faith. His prayers and generous giving had **not gone unnoticed by God**. God answers the sincere prayers of those who seek him by sending the right person or the right information at the right time.

10:5–6 God told Cornelius to send for **a man named Simon Peter** because Peter would give him more knowledge about the God he was already seeking to please. ~~Cornelius was directed to Joppa (thirty-two miles south of Caesarea) to find Peter.~~

~~**10:7–8** Cornelius obeyed the message of the angel and sent his most trusted aides to get Peter. Three men were sent—two household servants and a devout soldier, the latter of whom is described as one of his personal attendants. Obviously, the godly character of Cornelius had made an impact on those closest to him. The word used to describe Cornelius's account of what had happened is the word from which we get the term "exegesis" (exegesamenos), meaning to "explain" clearly and in detail.~~

PETER VISITS CORNELIUS / 10:9–33

Even as Cornelius's messengers were on their way to get Peter, the apostle was having a divine vision of his own. In this vision, three times Peter was commanded to kill and eat a number of unclean animals. Of Jewish descent, Peter was both horrified and confused by this strange dream. The meaning of the vision slowly became clear, however, when the messengers arrived and told their story (10:17–23).

10:9–10 Like Cornelius, Peter prayed daily. Morning and evening were the common times to pray, and evidently Peter made it a habit to pray in the middle of the day as well (see Nehemiah 1:4–11; Psalm 55:17; Daniel 6:10). This significant opening of the door to the Gentiles was God-directed, but note that the two men were devout, God-dependent, regular seekers of God through prayer. It is no coincidence that Peter and Cornelius were both found praying when God revealed more of himself to them.

Peter **went up to the flat roof to pray**. Houses in Bible times usually had flat roofs accessed by an outside staircase. The roof would have given Peter privacy. As he prayed, he **was hungry** and evidently **fell into a trance** while he was waiting for lunch to be prepared. During this trance God spoke to him.

10:11–14 Peter saw **something like a large sheet** being **let down** to earth from heaven. The **voice**, obviously that of someone in authority (probably God himself), told Peter that he was free to **kill and eat** the **animals**, including **reptiles** and **birds**. According to Jewish law, these particular foods were forbidden (see Leviticus 11). Peter, always ready to voice his opinion, expressed his conviction not to eat anything **forbidden by the Jewish laws**. The point of this vision, as was about to be made clear, **was that God was working outside of Israel, beyond Israel, and if Peter was to be a part of what God was doing, he needed to understand that nothing was unclean.**

10:15–16 This educating of Peter, as with the educating of most believers, took a little repetition—**three times** in this case. God was revealing something that would be startling to Peter's Jewish mind; God was basically nullifying the Jewish dietary laws and, by analogy, God was preparing Peter to meet an unclean Gentile.

10:17–20 Peter was **very perplexed**, and his confusion is understandable. For centuries the dietary restrictions had been in place for devout Jews. As Peter reflected over what **the vision** meant, his God-sent visitors arrived to



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provide an opportunity for Peter to apply what the voice from heaven had said. Peter was to **go with them without hesitation**, for they would take him to see the real meaning behind the vision of the sheet and the animals.

10:21–22 Peter was greeted by three men at the door (10:19–20) who introduced the one they represented. Cornelius’s godly character had obviously built him a good reputation. Peter was informed of the heavenly message that Cornelius had received, and he recognized it as being somehow related to his own. The openness of Cornelius to whatever **message** Peter would have to say was a beautiful foreshadowing of the coming Gentile openness to the message of the Cross.

10:23–24 Peter had been staying at the house of Simon the leatherworker. Peter continued to remove barriers: not only was he staying in a place that his prejudices would have previously prohibited (see commentary on 9:42–43), he went a step further by inviting Gentiles into that home **to be his guests**. This kind of fellowship would have been unacceptable to a strict Jew. A sheet had been let down from heaven, and Peter’s eyes were being opened.

Peter was wise to take with him **some other believers from Joppa** (six believers, according to 11:12). Some things, particularly changes as radical as Peter suspected were on the horizon, were better observed firsthand rather than explained secondhand. **Possibly Peter knew that it was easier for him to accept this new Gentile openness to the gospel because he had been present at the “Samaritan Pentecost” (8:15–17).** [Jesus was still teaching and training via the Holy Spirit.] If God were truly doing something new, it would be best that other believers could see it as well. The eagerness and expectation of Cornelius was obvious, for he **called together his relatives and close friends**, probably many, considering Cornelius’s reputation for kindness and piety.

10:25–27 The reaction of Cornelius to Peter’s arrival was that of one who felt he was in the presence of a messenger of God. Peter’s statement, **“I’m a human being like you,”** was profound. **Certainly these words would be spread throughout the Gentile world, that the great apostle had equated himself with a Roman centurion.**

10:28–29 Peter acknowledged his breaking of Jewish laws to enter this **Gentile home**, but he continued and gave the gathered audience the benefit of God’s vision of the sheet from heaven. Peter had gotten the message. The vision was not primarily about food; the dietary issues were secondary to the human ones. The vision was from **God** and was about people, specifically those people whom the Jews (and, as a carryover, the Jewish Christians) still considered “unclean.” Without reserve, Peter stated that God had shown him that he **should never think of anyone as impure**.

10:30–32 Cornelius recounted his experience for the sake of Peter and his gathered guests. Luke recorded it because it is a very important vision, and in each retelling, more details were added or emphasized. This will be repeated again by Peter in the next chapter (11:4–14). Here Cornelius added to his description of the angelic messenger, saying that he had been wearing **dazzling clothes**. Cornelius recounted to Peter what the angel had told him to do. Surely the specifics that had been given to Cornelius about Peter’s whereabouts showed how God was behind this meeting.

10:33 Cornelius stated that those present were in a holy convocation—**waiting before God**—and that their sole purpose was **to hear the message the Lord** had given Peter. Cornelius had sure, solid confidence that God was about to speak to them through Peter, and on behalf of all those gathered there, he expressed eagerness to hear what God had to say. If ever there was an ideal audience for a preacher or teacher, this was it.

THE GENTILES HEAR THE GOOD NEWS / 10:34–43

Having been sovereignly (even miraculously) guided to the home of Cornelius and having been impressed by the truth that God doesn’t show partiality (10:34), Peter took the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven given him by Christ (Matthew 16:19) and, in an epoch-changing moment, opened the door of salvation to the Gentiles.

10:34–35 Peter’s words—**God doesn’t show partiality, every nation, he accepts those who fear him**—express Peter’s clear understanding of the universal application of Christ’s work on the cross and the subsequent universal offer of the gospel. For more on God’s acceptance of all kinds of people, see Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 3:25; James 2:1, 9; 1 Peter 1:17. Because God doesn’t discriminate on the basis of race, economics, or sex, neither should any believers.

10:36 Assuming that his audience had already **heard** much of the information about the coming of Christ and the birth of the church, Peter proceeded to tell the story of Christ’s life and death in detail. This is a beautiful summary of the teaching of the apostles, and it perfectly parallels the Gospel of Mark (who probably received much of his information from Peter). This verse expresses the clear purpose of the gospel—to provide an opportunity for



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people to experience **peace with God**. The means by which that happens is **through Jesus Christ**, to whom Peter referred here by the powerful title, **Lord of all**.

10:37–38 Peter started where Mark’s Gospel does—with **John the Baptist**. He mentioned Christ’s ministry, including the good works and **healing** Jesus had done. Peter’s audience would likely have been familiar with most of these events. The miracles and the healings were a demonstration of Jesus’ power over **the Devil** as well as the fact that **God was with him** and in fact had **anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power** (Isaiah 61:1–3; Luke 4:16–21). The anointing of which Peter was speaking had occurred at Jesus’ baptism, when the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, had descended upon him (Mark 1:9–11; Luke 3:21–22).

10:39–41 In short order, Peter stated the fact that he and others had been **witnesses** to the ministry of Jesus, including his crucifixion and his resurrection. Peter acknowledged that there was no general appearance of Christ to the **public** but rather to those who had been chosen by God. In no way should that diminish the magnitude of the miracle or the credibility of the testimony of the witnesses. The fact that they had eaten and had drunk with him should squelch any rumor that Jesus had appeared in some “phantom” form. This was solid, decisive proof of Christ’s resurrection and was confirmed by one who had been there, had seen it, and had participated fully in it.

10:42 Christ came to judge (see 2 Timothy 4:1; 1 Peter 4:5). The command of the resurrected Christ was for these witnesses **to preach everywhere and to testify that Jesus is ordained of God to be the judge of all**. He is the one before whom ultimately all people (Jew and Gentile alike) will stand and give account. For Christ’s commands to the disciples, see Acts 1:8, also Matthew 28:18–20; Mark 16:15–18; Luke 24:47–48.

10:43 Christ came to forgive sin. In contrast to the preceding verse, Peter turned to the **prophets’** testimony for the flip side of judgment—salvation. Jesus Christ was the long-awaited Savior who would offer forgiveness of sins to **everyone who believes in him** (John 3:16). Two examples of prophets testifying about Jesus and his forgiveness of sins are Isaiah (see Isaiah 52:13–53:12) and Ezekiel (see Ezekiel 36:25–26).

Note again that Peter made it clear that this message is for **everyone**, not just the Jews. **Everyone** sins.

Everyone needs to be saved. **Everyone** needs forgiveness. All that is needed is faith.

THE GENTILES RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT / 10:44–48

To confirm the Gentiles’ acceptance by God and their full inclusion in his Kingdom as heirs of grace, Luke recorded these new converts’ experience of the Holy Spirit. Luke recorded the original Pentecost in chapter 2. Chapter 8 told of the “Samaritan Pentecost.” This event could be called the “Gentile Pentecost.” The Spirit came upon all those in attendance.

10:44 Peter’s sermon was interrupted by **the Holy Spirit**, who **fell upon all who had heard the message**. Unlike the Samaritan believers who had waited between belief and the baptism of the Spirit, which had come by the laying on of apostolic hands (see 8:17–18), the Spirit **fell** on these Gentile believers, just as he had at the first Pentecost—no laying on of hands, no praying for the Spirit to fall; God just did it!

10:45–46a The **Jewish believers** who had accompanied **Peter** (10:23) **were amazed** that the same phenomena of Pentecost were being demonstrated on **the Gentiles**. As at Pentecost, reported in chapter 2, these Gentiles experienced **speaking in tongues and praising God**. This was a powerful testimony to Peter and his Jewish contingency of the necessity of fully accepting Gentile believers into the body of Christ. Whatever lingering questions Peter may have had about his vision of a sheet and animals or about Cornelius’s visit by an angelic messenger would have been put aside in light of this event.

10:46b–48 In this case the believers were **baptized** after they received the Holy Spirit, publicly declaring their allegiance to Christ and identification with the Christian community. Peter’s words (**received the Holy Spirit just as we did**) reveal the impressiveness of what they had just seen. It was undeniable, irrefutable evidence that God had come to the Gentiles. They were now full-fledged, Spirit-indwelt members of the body of Christ. These new Spirit-baptized believers were then **baptized in the name of Jesus Christ**. Peter was invited by his new Christian friends to **stay with them for several days**, presumably for further instruction on what had just happened and what was next in this new life in Christ.

ACTS 11

PETER EXPLAINS HIS ACTIONS / 11:1–18

Word of Peter’s eating with Gentiles caused a negative reaction among the Jewish believers back in Jerusalem. The incident violated Hebrew customs and presuppositions. Following a detailed explanation of events by a persuasive and changed Peter, however, the others became convinced that God had ordered these surprising circumstances. The Jerusalem church began to accept the Gentile mission.



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11:1–3 Most **Jewish believers** thought that God offered salvation only to the Jews because God had given his law to them (Exodus 19–20). A group in Jerusalem believed that **Gentiles** could be saved, but only if they followed all the Jewish laws and traditions—in essence, if they became Jews before they became Christians (this would be the topic of discussion at the Jerusalem council—chapter 15). Thus, when **Peter arrived back in Jerusalem**, he was **criticized** for entering a Gentile home and then eating a meal with Gentiles. Both practices were terribly offensive to devout Jews who feared accidentally breaking one of their strict dietary regulations.

11:4–7 Peter then repeated to his critics **exactly what had happened** (see comments at 10:30). Evidently, he thought the best defense against his critics would be simply to tell the story as it happened. Peter wanted this potentially hostile (already critical) audience to know that he had been **praying** at the time that he saw the vision.

11:8–10 Peter repeated for his audience his refusal to “kill and eat” (11:7) these animals as instructed by the Lord. He quoted the response of the **voice from heaven**, instructing him that when **God says something is acceptable** not to **say it isn’t**. Finally, he noted the threefold repetition of this dialogue between himself and the Lord, and the pulling of the sheet back up to heaven again. This event and all the effects of it in Cornelius’s life became a primary argument for the Gentile mission in the early church.

11:11–12 Peter spoke of the arrival of the **three men from Caesarea**. Upon the command of no one less than the **Holy Spirit**, Peter had accompanied them, citing the Spirit’s command **not to worry about their being Gentiles**. He had taken **six** fellow believers with him to witness what was to happen and help recall it accurately. Peter understood that God was at work and deduced that something controversial (or potentially divisive) might take place. The potential for misunderstanding was evidently great enough for these men to have also accompanied Peter back to Jerusalem to report to the apostles. Jewish law only required two witnesses. Peter’s having six witnesses reveals the gravity of the issue and the significance of the event.

11:13–14 In two sentences Peter summarized the experience of Cornelius, which has already been recorded twice (see 10:1–7 and 10:30–32). It would be important to the Jewish audience to hear that an angelic messenger had also appeared to the principle Gentile figure in the drama.

Peter added a significant statement that had been excluded from the other accounts of Cornelius’s experience: the angel had told Cornelius that he and **all his household will be saved**. In other words, God’s intent from the start was to bring this Gentile soldier, along with his friends and family, to Christ.

11:15–17 Peter described that crucial moment in recounting his meeting with the Gentiles when **the Holy Spirit fell on them, just as he fell on the Jewish believers at the beginning**, referring to Pentecost (chapter 2). The Holy Spirit had come on these Gentile believers just as he had come on the Jewish believers. There was no difference between the two “Pentecosts” other than that the Jews’ experience had come first. These subsequent events, parallel to Pentecost, proved to the Jerusalem church that they must accept each new group of converts (the Samaritans, the Gentiles) because God had put his guarantee on them by repeating Pentecost.

Peter added what he had been thinking when the event had occurred, for he remembered something the risen Christ had said right before his ascension: **“John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit”** (1:5). Up until the event in Cornelius’s house, Peter (along with the rest of the Jewish believers) must have thought that the baptism of the Holy Spirit was reserved exclusively for Jewish believers. Having witnessed the baptism of the Holy Spirit on Gentile believers, Peter realized that Jesus’ words had a much broader application. Jesus had also demonstrated clearly that he and his message were for all types of people. He had preached in Samaria (John 4:1–42), in the region of the Gerasenes (populated by Greeks, Mark 5:1–20), and had even reached out to Roman citizens (Luke 7:1–10). The apostles shouldn’t have been surprised that they were called to do the same.

11:18 The theological discussion stopped with the report that God had given the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles. This was a turning point for the early church. They had to accept those whom God had chosen, even Gentiles.

The response was one of **praising God** as the congregation remarked on the fact that **God has also given the Gentiles the privilege of turning from sin and receiving eternal life**. This is a remarkable example of the spiritual health of this young church. Though steeped in centuries of Jewish rules and regulations, they had seen enough of God’s wonders over the past few months to know that God was moving in some new ways. Even though they had the words and example of Christ pointing them toward the Gentile world (Matthew 28:19; Acts 1:8), they had to overcome enormous inertia. The fact that they were so open to what God was doing and so responsive to Peter’s leadership speaks well of the work of the Spirit in their lives.

THE CHURCH IN ANTIOCH OF SYRIA / 11:19–30



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The closing verses of chapter 9 and the record in chapter 10 describe Peter's preparation for the universal dissemination of the gospel; and the opening verses of chapter 11 describe the apostles' preparation for the universal nature of the gospel, then these final verses of chapter 11 describe the preparation of the church at Antioch for the same thing. The focus of the church is shifting to the north, to this incredible missionary church in Antioch of Syria. The balance of this chapter gives a close-up view of a church that can be used mightily of God to change an entire empire and, beyond it, the world.

11:19 As Peter was dealing with this new issue of Gentiles entering the church, God was at work elsewhere. **Meanwhile**, the seeds of missionary work were being sown after Stephen's death, for many believing Jews were persecuted and scattered, settling in faraway cities and spreading the gospel. The **Good News** was being preached, **but only to Jews**.

There was a large Jewish population in **Antioch of Syria**. When persecution against Christians broke out in Jerusalem after the death of Stephen, many Christians fled there—three hundred miles north of Jerusalem. An important commercial center and the third largest city in the Roman Empire (population 500,000), the city of Antioch was located fifteen miles inland from the Mediterranean Sea on the Orontes River. Under the Roman Empire, Antioch became the capital of the province of Syria. The city was beautified by Caesars Augustus and Tiberius, with the help of Herod the Great. The city enjoyed a beautiful location and abundant water supply. But Antioch was a horribly corrupt city and was the center of worship for several pagan cults that promoted sexual immorality and other forms of evil common to pagan religions. This city would be home to the church that would be the sovereignly chosen group to fund and direct the next decade of church expansion under a new missionary, Paul.

11:20–21 **Cyprus** is an island off the Mediterranean coast from Antioch, and **Cyrene** was a city in northern Africa. Fortunately, these **believers** had the courage to spread the gospel of **the Lord Jesus** outside of the confines of Judaism. When these believers spoke, **the power of the Lord was upon them, and large numbers of these Gentiles believed and turned to the Lord**.

Evidently, this small beginning turned Antioch into a place where the believers aggressively preached to the Gentiles. Philip had preached in Samaria (8:5), but the Samaritans were part Jewish. Peter had preached to Cornelius, but he already worshiped God (10:2). Believers who were scattered after the outbreak of persecution in Jerusalem spread the gospel to other Jews in the lands where they had fled (11:19). Finally, the believers began actively sharing the Good News with Gentiles, with great results.

11:22–24 Word of the happenings in **Antioch** prompted the leaders of the Jerusalem church to send someone to investigate. **Barnabas** was the emissary. He was a wise choice for a number of reasons. From Cyprus, he would have had a natural national connection with the evangelists who had started the movement in Antioch. **Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and strong in faith**. His name means "Son of Encouragement" (4:36), and he lived up to it as **he encouraged the believers to stay true to the Lord**. The ministry of the gospel was thriving—**large numbers** believed.

11:25–26 **Saul** had been sent to his home in **Tarsus** for protection after his conversion caused an uproar among the Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem (9:26–30). He stayed there for several years before **Barnabas brought him back to Antioch**. Evidently, the work at Antioch had grown so that it was too much for Barnabas to handle alone. Barnabas and Paul's ministry in Antioch was marked by their **teaching**. Those who became believers were consistently and systematically instructed by these two teachers in the basics of their newfound faith.

The young church at Antioch was a curious mixture of Jews (who spoke Greek or Aramaic) and Gentiles. It is significant that this was the **first** place where the believers were called **Christians** ("Christ's ones"—the ending "-ian" means "belonging to the party of"). There has been a great deal of debate about who gave them the name "Christians." It is not likely that the believers themselves invented the name, because they had other terms for themselves like "disciples" or "saints" or "brothers." Certainly, the Jews would never want their term "Messiah" (*christos*) associated with this new movement. It is likely, therefore, that the term "Christian" was invented by the non-Christian culture of Antioch. One of the earliest extrabiblical occurrences of the term comes from a remark made by Emperor Nero. Whatever the case, the believers in Christ were becoming an identifiable group, distinct from Judaism and, at least in Antioch, primarily Gentile in composition.

11:27–28 **Prophets** were not limited to Old Testament times (see 13:1; 15:32; 21:9). God appointed certain people to be prophets to the church, and Paul ranked "prophets" second only to apostles in his list of those gifted by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:28). The Jews believed that prophecy had ceased during the time of the exile but



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would resurface as a sign of the Messiah's coming. Peter had quoted the prophet Joel in his sermon at Pentecost: "Your sons and daughters will prophesy" (2:17). Prophets had special gifts in ministering God's messages to his people. At times, they would foretell the future (as Agabus did here), but the gift of prophecy was also valued for its role in exhorting, encouraging, and strengthening God's people (1 Corinthians 14:31). God spoke through prophets, inspiring them with specific messages for particular times and places.

In the early church, these prophets seem to have traveled from place to place. **Agabus** predicted **that a great famine was coming upon the entire Roman world**. Agabus later would predict Paul's arrest in Jerusalem (see 21:10–11). What happened was actually a series of famines during the **reign** of Emperor **Claudius** (41–54 A.D.). This enigmatic pair of verses seems to introduce the reason for the Antioch church's support of the "mother" church in Jerusalem, mentioned in 11:29–30.

11:29–30 Because there were serious food shortages during this time due to the famine, **the believers in Antioch** assisted the church in Jerusalem. The daughter church had grown enough to be able to help the mother church. The solid reputation for the spiritual integrity of **Barnabas and Saul** is affirmed by the fact that they were the ones entrusted with the money. This visit was most likely the second visit of Paul to **Jerusalem**, occurring in about A.D. 46. This visit corresponds to Galatians 2:1–10. His first visit was in Acts 9:26–29, and that correlates with Galatians 1:18–20.

This is the first mention of **elders** in the New Testament (see 15:4, 6; 16:4; 21:18). Not much is known about their role in those days, but clearly, at least part of their responsibilities included managing the church's financial affairs. See 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9 for a later listing of their qualifications; see 1 Peter 5:1–4 and Acts 20:28–32 for some clues as to their responsibilities.

The chapter ends with a very healthy picture of this burgeoning, young, and mostly Gentile church. They had two high-quality teachers, Barnabas and Saul. They had a solid contingency of giving saints—donating enough money to tend to the local needs of the congregation **and** send something to the "mother church" at Jerusalem. The idea of a Gentile-Christian congregation sending help to a Jewish-Christian church highlights the quality of its spiritual character.⁴

ACTS 15

THE COUNCIL AT JERUSALEM / 15:1–21

As many Gentile believers came into the church, legalistic Jews demanded that these new converts be circumcised. Fierce arguing about this issue resulted in the first church council. At Jerusalem, the apostles and elders convened to consider the relationship between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians, between Moses' law and the gospel of grace.

The council concluded, based on the Old Testament book of **Amos[?]** (as expounded by James, leader of the proceedings), and in light of the experiences of both Peter and Paul, that Gentiles were accepted. Further, the council ruled that salvation depended solely on simple belief in Jesus, not on keeping the law of Moses.

15:1 These **men** were of a group called the Judaizers (see comments on 15:5). They came **from Judea** (perhaps from Jerusalem) to Antioch; they held the opinion that Gentiles could not be saved **unless** they kept **the ancient Jewish custom of circumcision taught by Moses**.

God had originally made the covenant of circumcision with Abraham (Genesis 17). This covenant was a sign of Abraham's and his descendants' obedience to God in all matters, and it signified the Jews as God's covenant people. More than any other practice, circumcision separated God's people from their pagan neighbors. Circumcision became part of the law of Moses. The problem described in this verse involves the terms under which Gentiles could be admitted into the church. These Jews from Judea were not disputing that Gentiles could be saved. They were insisting, however, that Gentiles must adhere to the laws of Moses, including the physical rite of circumcision. In effect, this was tantamount to saying that Gentiles must first become Jews before they could become Christians.

To understand the Judaizers' actions, we need to understand their mind-set. In the early days, all of the believers were Jews. In fact, the early church was viewed as a sect within Judaism. The Judaizers concluded that

⁴ Barton, B., Comfort, P., Osborne, G., Taylor, L. K., & Veerman, D. (2001). *Life Application New Testament Commentary* (pp. 507–513). Wheaton, IL: Tyndale.



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Christianity was not intended to **bypass** Judaism but to **build** on it. Judaism, with its centuries of history and tradition, was the prerequisite. They saw Jesus (and his message) as the final step in the long process. The Judaizers were afraid that soon there would be more Gentile than Jewish Christians. Also, they were afraid that moral standards among believers would be weakened if they did not follow Jewish laws.

15:2 This was no small difference of opinion. The Greek words for **disagreeing** and **argued forcefully** convey the idea of great strife, discord, disunion. This debate over circumcision and keeping the law was a major dispute, a serious theological and ecclesiastical crisis. If not handled wisely, the debate could have split the church. So **Paul and Barnabas were sent to Jerusalem, accompanied by some local believers**. They would meet with the **apostles and elders** in Jerusalem **about this question**.

15:3 On their journey to **Jerusalem** (a trip of about three hundred miles), Paul and Barnabas paid visits to several congregations. The church in **Phoenicia** was founded by believers who had fled from Jerusalem (11:19); **Samaria** had been evangelized by Philip (8:5). Rather than being alarmed at the news of the conversion of Gentiles, these believers expressed much **joy**.

15:4 The language of the text suggests a public meeting. This group **welcomed** Paul and Barnabas who then **reported** to the church that the events in question were things **God had been doing through their ministry**. The implication is that divine activity must indicate divine will. God surely would not be drawing the Gentiles to himself if he did not want them in his church or if they still had to fulfill other requirements before they could be saved.

~~**15:5** These Christians had been **Pharisees before their conversion** (like Paul). They found themselves having compatible views with Christianity because Pharisees believed in resurrection and in a Messiah, but many were reluctant to accept anyone who did not adhere to the oral tradition of law in addition to the Scriptures (Torah). Since only God knows the human heart, it is impossible to make a blanket statement regarding the eternal "destination" of this group. Probably some were sincere believers in the resurrection of Christ and his claim to be the Messiah (though obviously confused about the relationship between law and grace). Others likely were blindly trusting in their own moralistic efforts to make them acceptable to God. Still others may have been infiltrators with evil motives. Whatever these believers' individual status before God, the common concern of all in the Judaizer camp was that all Gentile converts **be required to follow the law of Moses**, especially regarding circumcision.~~

15:6 The exact makeup of this council is unknown. Other apostles (besides Peter, Paul, and James) may have been summoned and present. Verses 12 and 22 indicate that this discussion took place in the presence of the entire congregation. But the clear implication is that the church leaders, **the apostles and church elders** (and not the whole assembly), deliberated and decided this volatile issue.

15:7 The Gentile question prompted a **long discussion**. After lengthy interaction, **Peter** shared his experience of how God had used him **to preach to the Gentiles**. Specifically, he was referring to the incident described in chapter 10, where God had sovereignly led him to share the Good News with the Gentile Cornelius. If the Jerusalem council took place in about A.D. 50, then Peter was referring to an event that had occurred about ten years earlier.

15:8–9 Jews considered Gentiles impure and required them to undergo proselyte baptism in order to convert to Judaism. Peter made it clear that God had purified Cornelius and his family as a result of faith alone. God had **made no distinction between** them as Gentiles and the Jewish believers (see 10:34–48). All kinds of people have access to forgiveness and eternal life through their faith in Christ.

Peter bolstered his argument by noting God's outpouring of the Spirit. The Gentiles had received the **Holy Spirit** when they believed (**through faith**), not because they had done any works of the law (see 10:44–46; Galatians 3:2). The presence of the Spirit in them was the clearest evidence of their acceptance by God (Romans 8:9).

15:10–11 Peter warned that by making strict adherence to the law a prerequisite for salvation, the church would be guilty of **questioning God's way** (that is, doubting his wisdom and plan and thus arrogantly pursuing a different course of action). Furthermore, the Jewish believers would be putting an unbearable **yoke** on the Gentiles. The word "yoke" was a common figurative term for religious "obligations." It was the heavy wooden harness used by oxen to pull carts or plows. Here it suggests less of a religious duty and more of an onerous burden (see Matthew 23:4; 11:28–30).

If the law was a yoke that **neither** the Jews of that day nor their **ancestors** had been **able to bear**, however, how did having the law help them throughout their history? Paul wrote that the law had been a guide that had pointed out their sins so they could repent and return to God and right living (see Galatians 3:24–25). It was, and still is, impossible to obey the law completely. That would be a burden too hard for any human being.



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In effect, Peter urged the council not to advocate a double standard. Salvation—whether for Jew or Gentile—is by the special favor of the Lord Jesus (see Ephesians 2:8–9). What the law could never do, God did through Jesus Christ (Romans 8:1–4). No one deserves to be saved, and no religious, intellectual, or moral effort can earn salvation because it comes only from God’s mercy and love. To receive God’s salvation, people must acknowledge that they cannot save themselves and that only God can save them. Then they must trust in Christ.

15:12 In much the same manner as Peter, **Barnabas and Paul** related their recent experiences in ministry among the Gentiles. What gave their presentation added authority was the report of **miraculous signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles**. The missionaries gave full credit to God for these miracles. The clear implication is that these supernatural events signified God’s endorsement and blessing of their ministry to non-Jews (see commentary on 14:3).

15:13–14 James was Jesus’ half brother (Galatians 1:18–19) and the writer of the Epistle of James (perhaps already written and distributed prior to this council). James became the leader of the church in Jerusalem (12:17). We don’t know how James attained that important position (Clement of Alexandria wrote that he was chosen for the office by Peter and John), but clearly he was the leader. When this controversy over Gentile believers threatened to divide the church, Barnabas and Paul met with the elders and apostles in Jerusalem and submitted their authority to James as the moderator, spokesman, and announcer of the final decision.

The phrase, **God first visited**, is important because it underlines the truth that God had already made clear his plan to include Gentiles in the church before Paul and Barnabas ever went on the first missionary venture. The phrase, **to take from them a people for himself** (previously used only of the Jews as the people of God), here describes the Gentiles. This would have been heard as a remarkable statement by James.

15:15–18 Recognizing the need to base any forthcoming decision on something more substantial than mere experience, James went to the Scriptures. **He demonstrated how the conversion of Gentiles agrees with what the Old Testament prophets predicted. This was the ultimate test.**

Scholars have long wondered about this passage of Acts and the Old Testament quote it contains. James’s quote includes a text of **Amos 9:11–12** different from the Hebrew text and even from the Septuagint (an ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament). It is not clear why James did this, but it is obvious how he understood and applied this passage to the crisis facing the early church. In God’s judgment **the kingdom of David had fallen** and was reduced to **ruins**. God’s covenant with David stated that one of David’s descendants would always sit on his throne (2 Samuel 7:12–16). The exile of the Jews made this promise seem impossible. But God would **rebuild** and **restore** the kingdom to its promised glory. This was a promise to both Israel and Judah, not to be fulfilled by an earthly, political ruler but by the Messiah, who would renew the spiritual Kingdom and rule forever. James quoted these verses, finding this promise fulfilled in Christ’s resurrection and in the presence of both Jews and **Gentiles** in the church. When God brings in the Gentiles, he is restoring the ruins. After the Gentiles are called together, God will renew and restore the fortunes of the new Israel. All the land that was once under David’s rule will again be part of God’s nation.

Even though James quoted just one prophet, Amos, he said “prophets” (plural), perhaps alluding to other written Scriptures, like Isaiah 2:2; 11:10; 25:8–9; and Zechariah 8:23. His main point was that Gentile salvation apart from the law does not in any way contradict the Old Testament Scriptures.

15:19–21 Without explicitly mentioning circumcision, James echoed Peter’s argument by ruling that **we** (referring to the leaders in the church who were Jewish) **should stop troubling the Gentiles**. This was, in effect, a rejection of the circumcision requirement. But this judgment did include the stipulation that the Gentile converts should **abstain from eating meat sacrificed to idols**. This was a problem in the New Testament churches whereby meat was first sacrificed to idols and then sold in butcher shops (see 1 Corinthians 8:1–13; 10:18–33). They were also to abstain **from sexual immorality**, which was often a part of idol worship, although this probably referred to the common Gentile violation of Levitical matrimonial laws against marrying close relatives. The prohibition here was probably meant regarding prohibited marriage relationships like incest and homosexuality (see Leviticus 18:6–20). Finally, they were to abstain from **consuming blood or eating the meat of strangled animals**. This reflected the biblical teaching that life is in the blood. Strangling an animal would keep the blood in the circulatory system and not drained away, thus causing blood to be eaten with the meat (see Genesis 9:4; Leviticus 17:10–14).

If Gentile Christians would abstain from these practices, they would please God and get along better with their Jewish brothers and sisters in Christ. Of course, there were other actions inappropriate for believers, but the Jews were especially concerned about these. This ruling reflected the law of love (described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 8–



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10). There was a sense in which the Jews needed to be patient with these new Gentile believers who were not familiar with all the Old Testament laws and rituals. And there was a sense in which the Gentiles needed to be sensitive to the Jews who were there first—being careful not to offend.

[what the Gentile believers were asked to do allowed those who were afraid of historic disobedience to not be overwhelmed by the new believers. Community. Thinking of others.]

THE LETTER FOR GENTILE BELIEVERS / 15:22–35

The Jerusalem council summarized in a letter its decision regarding Gentile circumcision. This letter was carried to Antioch of Syria by Judas and Silas. Paul and Barnabas accompanied these specially chosen messengers. This directive brought joy to the believers at Antioch. The Jerusalem entourage stayed for a while, strengthening the believers and teaching the word of the Lord.

15:22 The **apostles** did not hold a church office but a position and function based on specific gifts (see 1 Corinthians 12:28). **Elders** were appointed to lead and manage the local church. In this meeting, the apostles submitted to the judgment of an elder—James, Jesus’ half brother.

A representative from the Jewish believers and one from the Gentile believers were appointed as **delegates** to go with Paul and Barnabas to deliver the council’s decision to **Antioch of Syria** and the surrounding churches. **Judas** was a Jew; **Silas** was a Greek. Their presence together would give credence to the council’s ruling. Later, Silas would accompany Paul on the second missionary journey in place of Barnabas, who would visit different cities with John Mark. Peter referred to Silas as the coauthor of 1 Peter (1 Peter 5:12), but it is not known when he joined Peter.

15:23 This letter concisely summarized the findings of the Jerusalem council. It would serve to validate the verbal report that Paul, Barnabas, Judas, and Silas would be delivering **to the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia**.

15:24–27 In this letter, the Jerusalem church disassociated itself from those **men** who had **troubled** the Gentile converts regarding circumcision. They had received **no such instructions** from the apostles and had been acting without their approval. They were not to be regarded as spokesmen for the church. Rather, the men bringing the letter (Paul, Barnabas, Judas, and Silas) had been chosen as **representatives** of the church, with authority to speak on behalf of the elders and apostles.

15:28–29 The letter implies a clear leading of God in the decision rendered (**it seemed good to the Holy Spirit**). Two of the council’s requirements involved issues of morality (avoiding idolatry and sexual immorality), and two involved issues of food. The dietary restrictions were because the early church often shared common meals (similar to modern-day church potluck dinners). Sometimes called “love feasts” and held in conjunction with the Lord’s Supper (see 1 Corinthians 11:17–34), these meals would bring Jews and Gentiles together. In such settings, a Gentile might horrify the Jewish Christians by eating meat that was not kosher. In this compromise agreement, legalistic Jews no longer insisted that the Gentiles had to be circumcised to be saved, and the Gentiles accepted a change in their eating habits. These decisions should not be regarded as divine ordinances but rather as stipulations for fellowship between the two parties. Their concerns were not so much theological as practical. For more discussion on these four stipulations, see comments at 15:19–20.

15:30–31 Luke painted a picture of a teachable, eager church in Antioch. Whereas the false teaching of the legalists had been burdensome and a source of great confusion, the divine wisdom behind the ruling of James and the elders resulted in a joyful, encouraged congregation. The law obligates; the gospel liberates.

The end result of the potential crisis was **great joy**. It’s easy to see why. First, a wise and careful approach to conflict resolution had been followed. Second, the leaders had ruled only after lengthy discussion and leading by the Spirit. Third, the members of the church had submitted to their God-appointed leadership. Churches today would be much happier and more peaceful if they followed these principles when handling conflict.

15:32–33 **Judas and Silas** remained in Antioch and used their prophetic gifts (see commentary on 11:27–28) **encouraging and strengthening** the believers’ **faith**. They then returned to Jerusalem. Several of the more reliable, ancient manuscripts do not contain verse 34.

15:35 The length of Paul and Barnabas’s stay in **Antioch** is not known. The fact, however, that **many others** were **teaching and preaching** there opened up the opportunity for Paul to attempt another missionary endeavor.

PAUL AND BARNABAS SEPARATE / 15:36–41



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When the time came for a second missionary journey, Barnabas and Paul had a sharp disagreement concerning John Mark. Barnabas wanted to take this young man, his nephew, but Paul refused, citing John Mark's desertion during the first evangelistic endeavor. This incident demonstrates the sovereignty of God as two missionary teams were formed: Paul and Silas, and Barnabas and Mark. Even though no further word is given regarding the results of Barnabas and Mark's evangelistic efforts, we see Kingdom messengers departing Antioch in two directions.

15:36 Paul wanted to take another trip, primarily to revisit the churches that had been established on the first missionary journey. Evangelism would prove to be a major component of Paul's mission, but establishing and equipping the **new believers** were his primary objectives (see Ephesians 4:11–12).

15:37–39 The grand plan of Paul and Barnabas to launch a follow-up campaign quickly unraveled when the topic of **John Mark** came up. The men disagreed over the inclusion of this young believer on another missionary trip. Paul adamantly did not want to take him along. Because he had **deserted** them on the first journey (13:13), Paul felt that he would be an unreliable person to have along. The debate between the old colleagues became heated—they **disagreed strongly** and ended up separating. Each formed his own missionary team. **Barnabas took John Mark** and sailed west to **Cyprus**. These two are not mentioned again in the book of Acts. It is important to note that the disagreement was not about theology. Both men would continue to teach the true gospel message. Through this disagreement God doubled the missionary effort.

15:40–41 Paul's second missionary journey, this time with **Silas** as his partner, began approximately three years after his first one ended. The two visited many of the cities covered on Paul's first journey, plus others. This journey would lay the groundwork for the church in Greece.

Silas had been involved in the Jerusalem council; he was one of the two men chosen to represent the Jerusalem church by taking the letter and decision back to Antioch (15:22). Paul, from the Antioch church, chose Silas, from the Jerusalem church, and they traveled together to many cities to spread the Good News. This teamwork demonstrated the church's unity after the decision at the Jerusalem council.⁵

⁵ Barton, B., Comfort, P., Osborne, G., Taylor, L. K., & Veerman, D. (2001). *Life Application New Testament Commentary* (pp. 524–528). Wheaton, IL: Tyndale.



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The Outsiders Are In (Acts 10:24–48)

There are a few pivotal moments in the life of the entire church, individual congregations, and individual Christians when God intervenes and exercises unusual control. Peter experienced one of those rare moments when he arrived in Caesarea and entered the home of Cornelius the centurion. A page was turning in human history. **There would be no going back to the old ways because God had turned that page.**

What things did Peter feel he needed to make clear to Cornelius upon arrival at his house? (Acts 10:24–29)

What did Cornelius expect as a result of the angelic message and Peter's arrival? (Acts 10:30–33)

Roman military personnel were forbidden to marry, so Cornelius's "household" (Acts 10:2) and "relatives" (v. 24) refer to servants and fellow countrymen (other soldiers) rather than to a wife and children. How does Cornelius's interest in his servants and fellow countrymen fit in with the other things said about him?

Cornelius could show humility by bowing before Peter (Acts 10:25) and an air of authority by assuring Peter he had done the right thing in answering his summons (v. 33). Peter resisted the flattery of inappropriate worship (v. 26), and he took no offense at Cornelius's authoritative ways. Which troubles you more in dealing with people: flattery or authority? Why?

If you were called on to share the gospel with a powerful nonbeliever from a corporation, political party, or social group you strongly disliked, which of the following responses best represents the way you would react?

- a. Anger because you would have to deal with a person you disapproved of.
- b. Fear that you wouldn't represent the gospel of Christ well.
- c. Suspicion that this person really wanted to discredit the gospel rather than believe it.
- d. Excitement about the chance to share Christ with someone discerning, motivated, and influential.
- e. Pride that you were the one who got to deal with an important person
- f. Other

Circle the letters of the following situations in which you have witnessed for Christ. Then draw a box around the ones you would rather not face. Finally, put a star by the boxed situation that would be most difficult for you.

- a. A family member
- b. A neighbor
- c. A school friend
- d. A fellow worker
- e. A church visitation contact
- f. On a mission trip
- g. After a church service
- h. With a homeless person
- i. Across the African-American/Anglo barrier
- j. With a welfare mother
- k. Across the Hispanic/Anglo barrier



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- l. Across the Asian/Anglo barrier
- m. With a secular humanist
- n. With a mass murderer
- o. With a sex offender against children
- p. With a Muslim fundamentalist

When Peter said that God accepts “whoever fears Him and works righteousness” (Acts 10:34), he did not use “accept” as a synonym for “save.” What “acceptance” had Cornelius’s reverence and righteousness gained him up to that point?

Summarize the message of Peter about Jesus in one sentence of no more than 30 words. (Acts 10:34–43)

Consider this

Read the *WILSB* feature “Ethnic Walls Break Down” (Acts 10:44–45). “When Peter met Cornelius—an officer of Rome’s occupation troops in Palestine—two conversions took place: Cornelius, his family, and his friends came to faith; and Peter came to realize that God wants Gentiles in the church.”

In Peter’s eyes, how many facts about Cornelius, recorded or implied in Acts 10, made him objectionable?

In God’s eyes, how many facts about Cornelius, recorded or implied in Acts 10, moved God to send Peter to him?

What did Peter learn about God’s intentions toward the Gentiles through his contact with Cornelius? (Acts 10:34–35, 44–48)

How has God changed your attitudes toward people of other races?

What further changes in your racial attitudes do you think He might expect of you in the future?

“If I Hadn’t Seen It, I Wouldn’t Have Believed It” (Acts 11:1–18)

God had arranged for Cornelius and Peter to meet. The divine element was undeniable. He saw to it that six Jewish witnesses accompanied Peter to Cornelius’s house to verify everything that happened (Acts 11:12). Finally, He poured out the Holy Spirit on Cornelius and his guests as indisputable evidence that believing Gentiles were fully in His grace (10:44, 47). Even so, it was difficult for Peter to convince the Jewish believers in Jerusalem that his mission to Cornelius had been of God’s doing.

The Jewish believers were not concerned that the Gentiles had believed in Jesus as their Savior. What did bother them? (Acts 11:1–3)

Today, also, biased Christians welcome the salvation of people they don’t like while objecting to social contact with them. What kinds of social contacts with other races do prejudiced Christians often object to?

How does the significance of Peter’s vision apply to the objection of biased Christians to social contacts with people of other races? (Acts 11:4–9)

Peter didn’t focus on explaining his social contacts with Cornelius and his household and friends. Instead he focused on the legitimacy of their conversion and reception of the Holy Spirit (Acts 11:15–17). What were the implications for the Jewish social biases against Gentiles that the Gentiles became Christians just as they had?

What are the implications for biased Christians today that the objects of their prejudices become Christians just as they do?

There were two stages to the response of the Jewish believers in Jerusalem (Acts 11:18). What do you think was happening to their biases during each of them?

- Silence
- Glorifying God

Consider this

Read the *WILSB* feature “Come One, Come All!” (Acts 10:34). “Luke peppers his Acts account with incidents of ethnic tension and prejudice, and also their resolution in Christ.” Read the following excerpts from Acts and indicate the ethnic barrier Jesus overcame.

- Acts 6:1–7
- Acts 8:5–8
- Acts 8:26–40
- Acts 10:1–48
- Acts 11:19–26



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- Acts 13:1–14:26
- Acts 15:1–33

6

“What God Has Joined Together ...”

(Acts 15:1–21)

When Cornelius became a believer in Jesus, he didn’t establish a pattern of Gentile conversions. When the church at Antioch included Gentile members, they still had some sort of relationship to Judaism first. But when Paul and Barnabas established churches in Asia Minor that included pure pagan Gentile believers, the mother church in Jerusalem could not ignore the revolutionary implications of Christian faith that had no connection to the Law of Moses.

How did the argument develop that had to be settled by the council at Jerusalem? (Acts 15:1–2)

How did this argument divide the existing churches? (Acts 15:3–5)

Consider this

Read the *WILSB* features “Growth Leads to New Understanding” (Acts 15:2) and “Issues of Faith and Culture” (Acts 15:6). “An encounter with a different culture can sometimes force believers to evaluate what they believe and why.”

What are some “truth issues”—matters of doctrine and biblical interpretation—that people differ over in your church?

What are some “love issues”—matters of open-mindedness and toleration—that people differ over in your church?

Consider this

Read the *WILSB* feature “Sure You’re Saved ... Sort of” (Acts 15:1–21). “Even in the church we often find our security in sameness and sometimes exclude those who differ. Diversity feels uncomfortable. But in Acts 15, we might consider what it would take to address our concerns honestly and biblically.”

What role did Peter’s testimony play in the conclusion of the Jerusalem council? (Acts 15:7–11)

What part did the report of Barnabas and Paul play in the decision of the Jerusalem council? (Acts 15:12)

What contribution to the decision of the Jerusalem council did James the brother of Jesus make by referring to Amos 9:11–12? (Acts 15:13–21)

On the following scales circle the numbers that represent the actual strength of each component in resolving differences in your church. Then put a box around the number in each scale that represents the strength you think each component should have in resolving differences.

SOCIETAL NORMS

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

THE OPINIONS OF LEADERS

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

“... Let Not Man Put Asunder”

(Acts 15:22–35)

The council at Jerusalem acknowledged that Gentile Christians were free from any requirement to obey the Law of Moses. The Jerusalem church refused to put requirements on Gentiles that God did not put on them, even though their decision undoubtedly made witness and even survival more difficult in Jerusalem.

The letter the Jerusalem council sent Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia (Paul’s home territory around Tarsus) addressed both a “truth issue” and a “love issue.” What was the “truth issue” that concerned theology and biblical interpretation? (Acts 15:24)

What was the “love issue” that involved practical unity? (Acts 15:28–29)

Why was it important to send representatives from Jerusalem along with Paul and Barnabas to deliver the decision of the council? (Acts 15:22, 25–27, 32–33)

⁶ Snider, J. (1996). *Word in life bible discovery guide: acts* (pp. 62–67). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.



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Consider this

Read the *WILSB* feature “A Church That Defies Market Research” (Acts 15:22–35). “As the twentieth century closes and the twenty-first century begins, the population of the United States is becoming increasingly diverse. Can the church prosper in a pluralistic society? Yes, judging by Acts.”

What conclusions would you draw from the first fifteen chapters of Acts about the importance or desirability of diversity in the church of Jesus Christ?

What do the first fifteen chapters of Acts suggest are the strengths and weaknesses of a church composed of people from just one background?

What kinds of conflicts does the first half of Acts suggest that a diverse church can expect to face?

What sorts of spiritual gains does the first half of Acts suggest that a diverse church will make if it struggles and solves its conflicts?

Write a prayer for your church in which you ask God to bless your church as it deals with the “culture clashes” it has to deal with.⁷

What Was the Meaning and Importance of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15)?

In the earliest days of the Christian church, the church was comprised predominately of Jews. In Acts chapter 8 the gospel spread to the Samaritans (who were ethnically mixed Jews-Gentiles), and many Samaritans received Jesus Christ as Savior. In Acts chapter 10, the Apostle Peter was the first to take the gospel specifically to the Gentiles, and many received Christ as Savior. In Acts chapter 13–14, Paul and Barnabas had a very fruitful ministry among the Gentiles. All of these Gentiles turning to faith in Christ caused concern among the Jewish believers, first expressed in Acts 11:1–18, and the issues that caused concern were ultimately decided upon at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15). The issues centered on two questions: Do Gentiles first have to become Jews before they can become Christians? Do Gentiles have to observe the Mosaic Law after they become Christians?

The impetus for the Jerusalem council is given in Acts 15, verses 1 and 5, “But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved’ ... It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the Law of Moses.” Some Jewish Christians were teaching that Gentiles had to observe the Mosaic Law and Jewish customs in order to be saved. Since this teaching clearly contradicted the fact that salvation was by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone (Acts 15:11), the apostles and church leaders held the first Christian council to settle the issue. In verses 7–11, the apostle Peter spoke of his ministry with the Gentiles, as recorded in Acts chapter 10. Peter focused on the fact that the Holy Spirit was given to uncircumcised Gentiles in precisely the same manner the Holy Spirit was given to the apostles and Jewish believers on the day of Pentecost. This led Peter to the conclusion that there should be no “placing a yoke on the neck of the (Gentile) disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear” (Acts 15:10).

Jesus’ half-brother James, who had become a leader of the church in Jerusalem, agreed with Peter and declared, “It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God” (Acts 15:19). The Jerusalem Council then proceeded to give four “rules” that Gentile Christians should live by. These were not rules the Gentiles must follow in order to be saved. Rather, the rules were to build harmony between Jewish and Gentile Christians in the first century. The four rules the Jerusalem Council decided upon were that Gentile Christians should abstain from: food polluted by idols, sexual immorality, the meat of strangled animals, and blood. The instructions were not intended to guarantee salvation but to *promote peace within the early church*.

It is interesting that the issue the Jerusalem Council was dealing with is still very much an issue in the church today. There are groups still teaching that Christians must obey the Old Testament Law. Whether it is the Sabbath day or the food laws or all of the Old Testament Law outside of the sacrificial system—there are groups which declare observance of the Law is either required for salvation, or at least a crucially important aspect of the Christian life. Sadly, these groups either completely ignore or grossly misinterpret the decision of the Jerusalem Council. The specific goal of the Jerusalem Council was to decide what aspects, if any, of the Old Testament Law, Christians must observe. The Jerusalem Council, for the sake of melding the Jewish and Gentile cultures within the Antioch church, said that the Gentiles should eschew their former pagan practices associated with idolatry. There was no mention of the Sabbath whatsoever. Further, the Jerusalem Council made it abundantly clear that these rules were not requirements for salvation by reaffirming that salvation is by grace for both Jews and Gentiles (Acts 15:11). **How**

⁷ Snider, J. (1996). *Word in life bible discovery guide: acts* (pp. 83–86). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.



Presenting Peter Who is this man called Peter?

many arguments would be solved if the church today would simply follow the principle set by the Jerusalem Council—limit your liberty for the sake of love?⁸

JERUSALEM COUNCIL, THE—a conference held in about A.D. 49 between delegates from the church at Antioch of Syria and delegates from the church at Jerusalem. This council met to settle a dispute over whether Gentile converts had to be circumcised (Acts 15:1-29).

According to Luke, “Certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved’” (Acts 15:1). They insisted that Gentiles could not be received into the church unless they were circumcised and brought under the rules of the Mosaic Law. The apostle Paul, champion of Gentile freedom, said that all people—both Jews and Gentiles—are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, apart from the works of the Law. To require circumcision, he argued, would destroy the Good News of God’s grace.

The conclusion of the Jerusalem Council, which determined that Gentiles did not have to be circumcised, was a decisive moment of the Holy Spirit’s opening the door to world evangelism. Speaking for the council, the apostle Peter declared, “We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we [Jews] shall be saved in the same manner as they [the Gentiles]” (Acts 15:11).

Why was the decision of the Jerusalem Council so important? A decision that circumcision is necessary for anyone to become a Christian would have compromised the truth of the gospel. Instead of a gospel based on salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, it would have become one based on salvation by works (the Law).

The Jerusalem Council decreed, therefore, that the Gentiles should make four reasonable concessions of their own: “We write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood” (Acts 15:20, also 15:29, 21:25). The council was both a theological and a practical success. The concessions it called for were not “compromises”; indeed, they reaffirmed the integrity of the gospel of salvation by faith alone. They also affirmed the spiritual importance of sexual purity and certain tradition. This first great threat to the unity of the church ended instead with rejoicing and encouragement (Acts 15:31).⁹

PASSION OF PETER AND PAUL The name of a noncanonical work that appears in two versions from the sixth or seventh century AD and describes the martyrdom of Peter and Paul. could it have been based on its late date.

Text

There are two versions of this *Passion of Peter and Paul*

- The longer of the two is extant in Latin, Greek, and Slavonic. This narrative—also known as *Pseudo-Marcellus*—covers Paul’s journey from Malta to Rome and includes his and Peter’s deaths after encountering Simon Magus. The Greek manuscripts of this narrative contain a letter from Pilate to the emperor Claudius (de Santos Otero, “Later Acts,” 440).
- A shorter Latin narrative is a redaction of a section of *On the Ruin of the City of Jerusalem* by Pseudo-Hegeippus, which in turn draws on material from Josephus’ *Jewish War*. A chapter in *On the Ruin of the City of Jerusalem* (book 3, chapter 2) details the confrontation between Peter and Simon Magus—including Paul’s appearance in the scene—and a short account of the two apostles’ deaths at the hands of Nero (de Santos Otero, “Later Acts,” 439).

Contents of the Longer Version

Set in Rome, *The Passion of Peter and Paul* describes the apostles proclaiming the gospel, appearing before Nero, and causing the death of Simon Magus (Acts 8:5–25). The narrative begins with Paul’s arrival in Rome, where he meets Peter. Together they boldly preach the gospel, agitating both pagan and Jewish nonbelievers. Instead of believing in Jesus, many people praise Simon Magus as the Christ.

⁸ Got Questions Ministries. (2002–2013). *Got Questions? Bible Questions Answered*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

⁹ Hayford, J. W., Thomas Nelson Publishers. (1995). *Hayford’s Bible handbook*. Nashville, TN; Atlanta, GA; London; Vancouver: Thomas Nelson Publishers.



Presenting Peter Who is this man called Peter?

Peter, Paul, and Simon go before the emperor Nero to present their cases. Simon astonishes Nero with supernatural deeds, but Peter and Paul accuse Simon of being a sorcerer. Simon persuades Nero to build a tall wooden tower. Simon climbs the tower and ascends into the sky as proof of his divinity. However, Peter prays and commands the demons assisting Simon to drop him—which they do, causing Simon to fall to his death.

Peter and Paul are blamed for Simon's death and arrested. Paul is beheaded, but Peter is crucified upside down. Believers, including a former follower of Simon named Marcellus, bury the bodies of the apostles. The text is attributed to this Marcellus.

Contents of the Shorter Version

The shorter, Latin version of the *Passion of Peter and Paul* has the two apostles arrive together in Rome, where they lodge with a relative of Pilate. As in the longer version, they engage in conflict with Simon Magus, but here Simon dies in Aricia rather than in Rome. This version says comparatively little about the apostles' martyrdom.

Key Elements

Both versions of the *Passion of Peter and Paul* include several noteworthy features: the relationship of Peter and Paul, the magic powers displayed by Simon, and the deaths of the main characters. First, the unity of Peter and Paul is central to the story, but Peter is ultimately portrayed as superior. While Peter and Paul proclaim Christ's truth side by side throughout the story, Peter's supremacy is obvious: Paul states that Peter knew the Lord first and was trusted by Christ.

Second, the connection between Simon Magus and sorcery and magic is striking—although his appearance in the New Testament is limited, later church tradition attributed many heresies to Simon.

Third, the main characters' deaths are marked by interesting circumstances. For instance, in the longer version Simon's violent death is graphically depicted in a manner commensurate with blasphemy. The executions of Peter and Paul reflect extrabiblical traditions. (Apart from Jesus' vague prediction of Peter's death in John 21:18–19, Scripture says nothing of how either apostle died.)

Related Articles

For information on the process of canonization, see this article: Canon, New Testament.

Selected Resources for Further Study

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PAUL J. MARTIN¹⁰

ACTS OF PETER AND PAUL A noncanonical text written perhaps in the sixth or seventh century AD, that portrays Peter and Paul together in ministry and martyrdom. This text was never widely authoritative in the early church period, nor could it have been, based on its late date.

The subject of this text is the apostolic collaboration of Peter and Paul in Rome and their martyrdoms there. It begins with Paul's journey from Gaudomelete (perhaps referring to the two islands of Gozo and Malta) to Rome. After Paul's arrival, the text takes the same form as the version of the *Passion of Peter and Paul* that is also known as *Pseudo-Marcellus*.

In the text, when Peter learns that Paul has come to Rome, Peter goes to meet him and they cry with joy. Paul then settles a dispute between Jewish and Gentile Christians. In addition, some members of Nero's household become Christians as a result of Paul's preaching.

In the longest section of this text, Peter and Paul testify against Simon Magus before Nero. A letter written from Pontius Pilate to the emperor Claudius, expressing Pilate's belief in Jesus' divinity, is then produced. But Paul is beheaded anyway, and upon his death, a one-eyed, god-fearing woman named Perpetua has her sight restored.

¹⁰ Martin, P. J. (2016). [Passion of Peter and Paul](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.



Presenting Peter Who is this man called Peter?

In the text, Peter is then bound to a cross; he explains that he followed Jesus by coming to Rome and then surrenders his spirit (Lipsius, *Acta*, 182–216). In one version of the narrative, Nero keeps the corpse of Simon Magus at the imperial palace in Rome for three days, expecting him to rise from the dead (Klauck, *Apocryphal Acts*, 108).

Related Articles

For further information on the *Acts of Peter and Paul* and other works like it, see this article: Apocryphal Acts. For information on the process of canonization, see this article: Canon, New Testament.

Selected Resources for Further Study

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MARK REASONER¹¹

Peter and Paul

Jesus has promised his disciples that they will do the same work as he has been doing (John 14:12). Luke shows how this promise comes true. The activities of the first Christians reflect the ministry of Jesus.

Peter and Paul confront the power of Satan. They win battles over deceit, disease and demon possession. The first Christians also take care of people in need, and organize themselves to share their possessions and protect the weak.

The book of Acts shows us a lively, practical, persecuted church. The first Christians are not perfect, but they are enterprising and full of faith. We see how the Holy Spirit (the Spirit of Jesus) changes people's lives and enables the church to live together as a strong and caring group. The Spirit of Jesus guides the church's mission, and confirms new converts with his gifts.

At first because of persecution, and then through mission, the gospel spreads outside Jewish areas. Soon the good news is being preached in Samaria, Asia Minor and Europe. Both Peter and Paul are involved, as Christianity seems to be rejected by Jews but welcomed by Gentiles. There is a major problem over whether people have to become Jews before they become Christians. This is thoroughly debated by the church's leaders in Jerusalem. They give simple guidelines for non-Jews (Gentiles) who have become Christians.

Luke is a careful historian, and many of his facts can be checked. But his main aim is to tell us what is going on spiritually. God is spreading his kingdom in the lives of men and women through the good news of Jesus Christ. This comes across most clearly in the story of the Day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit is poured out on the apostles—a blessing which is repeated at each major stage of the church's growth. There is also no need for division or party spirit in the young church. Peter and Paul, and Jews and Gentiles, are all on the same side in this great new work of God.

Luke repeats episodes which are very important. He tells the story of Saul's conversion three times, and the conversion of Cornelius twice. He also gives us the outlines of sermons preached by Peter and Paul. Most of all, Luke shows how the gospel breaks through barriers of culture and race, to reach despised Samaritans, an Ethiopian official, a Roman centurion, an Asian businesswoman, a Philippian jailer and many others.

Luke's book is the main account we have of the Christian mission in the years between the ascension of Jesus (around AD 27) and AD 60.

What about us?

As we read about the first Christians, we are bound to wonder whether we should be the same. Should we all share our possessions, be baptized in the Holy Spirit and speak in 'tongues'?

¹¹ Reasoner, M. (2016). [Acts of Peter and Paul](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.



Presenting Peter Who is this man called Peter?

Paul tells us that these things are done and experienced by some people sometimes. The Holy Spirit is God’s gift to all Christians, but it is not compulsory to speak in other languages or have visions to prove that he lives in us. We are each unique, and God will give us the gifts and experiences of his choice (1 Corinthians 12:4–11).

Luke tells us the message Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost. He gave a ringing call to turn from sin, and a profound promise that God would come and live in our lives by his Spirit. The practical and public step we are to take is to be baptized!

Repent and be baptised every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).¹²

The Deaths of Peter and Paul

The early church fathers place the deaths of Peter and Paul in Rome under Nero (e.g., 1 Clem. 5.3–4; Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.25.5). Nero became increasingly unstable in the later years of his reign and, to cover his actions relative to the fires of Rome (AD 64), he shifted the blame to Christians of the city and persecuted them savagely (Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44; Suetonius, *Nero* 16). According to Eusebius, Paul was beheaded (*Ecclesiastical History* 2.25.5) and Peter was crucified “head downwards” (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.1.2). Given two years of initial incarceration (Acts 28:30), release, further ministry and re-arrest, a date for Paul’s death in the mid to late AD 60s seems the most plausible. Assuming the reliability of the patristic witness, both he and Peter would have been killed before Nero’s suicide in AD 68 at the latest (Suetonius, *Nero* 49).¹³

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES — the one historical book of the New Testament, which traces the development of the early church after the ascension of Jesus. Standing between the Gospels and the Epistles, the Book of Acts is a bridge between the life of Jesus and the ministry of the apostle Paul. As such, it offers invaluable information about the development of the early church.

The title of Acts is somewhat misleading, for only a few of the apostles of Jesus are mentioned in the book. In reality, Acts relates some acts of some of the apostles, primarily Peter and Paul, and involves a time-span of about 32 years—from the ascension of Jesus (about A.D. 30) to Paul’s imprisonment in Rome (about A.D. 62). See CHRONOLOGY, NEW TESTAMENT.

Structure of the Book. The Acts of the Apostles is like a drama with two main characters, Peter and Paul. This drama portrays the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem—the city where Jesus was crucified—to Rome, the capital of the Roman Empire.¹⁴

Peter’s Travels

The first twelve chapters of Acts are largely concerned with the apostle Peter. The early leader of the Jewish-Christian church in Jerusalem, Peter was also instrumental in the extension of the gospel message to the Gentiles through his response to the vision of the clean and unclean animals in chapter 10.

Dreams and Visions

In New Testament times, God often used dreams (when a person was asleep) and visions (when a person was awake) to make His will known. Particularly in the book of Acts, church leaders such as Peter and Paul received guidance through visions for future ministry.

Personality	Message of Dream	Biblical Reference
Joseph	Three separate dreams: (1) assured of Mary’s purity	Matt. 1:20

¹² Knowles, A. (2001). *The Bible guide* (1st Augsburg books ed., pp. 535–536). Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg.

¹³ Sweeney, J. P. (2016). *Chronology of the New Testament*. In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

¹⁴ Youngblood, R. F., Bruce, F. F., & Harrison, R. K., Thomas Nelson Publishers (Eds.). (1995). In *Nelson’s new illustrated Bible dictionary*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc.



Presenting Peter Who is this man called Peter?

- (2) warned to flee to Egypt Matt. 2:13
- (3) told to return to Nazareth Matt. 2:19–23

Wise men Warned of Herod’s plot against the Matt. 2:12
baby Jesus

VISIONS

Personality	Message of Vision	Biblical Reference
Paul	Converted to Christianity in a blinding vision of Christ on the Damascus road	Acts 9:3–9
Ananias	Instructed to minister to Saul in Damascus	Acts 9:10–16
Cornelius	Instructed to ask Peter to come to Joppa	Acts 10:3–6
Peter	Told to eat unclean animals—a message to accept the Gentiles	Acts 10:9–18, 28
Paul	Beckoned to do missionary work in the province of Macedonia	Acts 16:9
Paul	Assured of God’s presence in Corinth	Acts 18:9, 10
Paul	Promised God’s presence during his trip to Rome	Acts 23:11
Paul	Viewed the glories of the third heaven	2 Cor. 12:1–4
John	Received series of visions of future	Rev. 4:1–22:11

Peter and Paul Compared

In Acts 12:25, Luke’s literary attention turns from Peter to Paul, and from the predominantly Jewish-Christian church to the Gentile-Christian church. Paul’s status and role as a true Apostle is highlighted by the parallels between his ministry and Peter’s.

The Life of Paul	
Peter	Paul
Heals a man lame from birth (3:1–11)	Heals a man lame from birth (14:8–18)
Heals people by his shadow (3:15, 16)	Heals people by handkerchiefs or aprons (19:11, 12)
Success is a cause for Jewish jealousy (5:17)	Success is a cause for Jewish jealousy (13:45)



Presenting Peter Who is this man called Peter?

Confronts Simon, a sorcerer (8:9–24)

Confronts Bar-Jesus, a sorcerer (13:6–11)

Raises Tabitha (Dorcas) to life (9:36–41)

Raises Eutychus to life (20:9–12)

Is jailed and freed miraculously by God (12:3–19)

Is jailed and freed miraculously by God (16:25–34)

15

TRANCE—(Gr. ekstasis, from which the word “ecstasy” is derived) denotes the state of one who is “out of himself.” Such were the trances of Peter and Paul, Acts 10:10; 11:5; 22:17, ecstasies, “a preternatural, absorbed state of mind preparing for the reception of the vision”, (comp. 2 Cor. 12:1–4). In Mark 5:42 and Luke 5:26 the Greek word is rendered “astonishment,” “amazement” (comp. Mark 16:8; Acts 3:10).¹⁵

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PETER AS “PONTIFEX MAXIMUS”

“YOU ARE the scourge of God,” cried a hermit as Attila the Hun led his cavalry and well-armed foot soldiers out of the endless pastures of central Asia to invade the western half of the Roman Empire. The Hun’s march up the Danube in the fifth century forced inhabitants on both sides of the valley to flee, until he confronted Roman legions and their Gothic allies in central Europe. “Yes, you are the scourge of God,” the hermit had prophesied, “but God will break the tool of his revenge. Know that you will suffer defeat!”

In June 452 the “Scourge of God” advanced on Rome. A sudden raid over the Alps brought him into northern Italy, where he met with resistance at only a few places. The weakened Roman army kept out of range and the population fled. In spite of pestilence and mutiny, Attila drove his horses and men on.

At a fordable spot on the Po River, Attila met an embassy from Rome, the usual peace delegation. He was about to send them away when he heard that Bishop Leo was there, as emissary for the Roman emperor.

Leo was commissioned to negotiate with one of the mighty men of the panic-stricken world, in the hope of avoiding chaos. He must save what there was to save. The Roman Emperor was doing nothing to preserve the ancient capital of the empire and its surrounding territories from devastation. So Peter’s deputy, now acting in the name of the emperor, sat facing Attila alone.

Man to man, the contest seemed unequal. On the one side, the law of conquest; on the other, the law of faith. On the one side, triumph over the wounded, the ravaged, the dying; on the other, submission to the divine mysteries of the church. A foreign king and a ruling pope.

Long before the arrival of the embassy from Rome, Attila had probably made up his mind about further military thrusts. Epidemics in his army added to widespread famine were forcing him to break off the advance. But nobody knew it. So he willingly granted an interview to the imperial envoy, and in the course of it he granted the pope’s plea that the capital should be spared. He even promised to withdraw from Italy, and he kept his word. The Bishop of Rome had assumed a new role and staked a fresh claim on the future.

The papacy is a highly controversial subject. No other institution has been so loved and so hated. Some Christians have revered the pope as the “Vicar of Christ”; others have denounced him as the “Anti-Christ.”

All sides agree, however, that Leo represents an important stage in the history of this unique institution. He demonstrates the papacy’s capacity to adapt to different environments in its long history: The Roman Empire, the Germanic kingdoms of the Middle Ages, the national states of modern times, and today the developing worlds of Asia and Africa. What is the foundation of the papal office, and when was it laid?

¹⁵ Thomas Nelson Publishers. (1996). *Nelson’s complete book of Bible maps & charts: Old and New Testaments* (Rev. and updated ed.). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

¹⁶ Easton, M. G. (1893). In *Illustrated Bible Dictionary and Treasury of Biblical History, Biography, Geography, Doctrine, and Literature*. New York: Harper & Brothers.



Presenting Peter Who is this man called Peter?

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CLAIM

According to the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, denned at the First Vatican Council (1870), Jesus Christ established the papacy with the apostle Peter; and the Bishop of Rome as Peter's successor bears the supreme authority (primacy) over the whole church. Both Eastern Orthodox churches and Protestant denominations deny both of these claims. For this reason any study of the history of the papacy creates controversy, comparable to sticking your hand into a hornet's nest.

Our primary concern, however, is neither the vindication nor the refutation of the Roman Catholic claims. It is a survey of Christian history. Whatever the absolute claims of church authorities, history indicates that the concept of papal rule of the whole church was established by slow and painful stages. Leo is a major figure in that process because he provides for the first time the biblical and theological bases of the papal claim. That is why it is misleading to speak of the papacy before his time.

The term *pope* itself is not crucial in the emergence of the doctrine of papal primacy. The title "papa" originally expressed the fatherly care of any and every bishop of his flock. It only began to be reserved for the bishop of Rome in the sixth century, long after the claim of primacy.

We must also separate the honor of the church of Rome from the authority of its head. The early centuries of Christian history offer abundant evidence of Rome's prominence among the churches of the western regions of the empire. Honor surrounded her name for several reasons. First, Rome was the imperial capital, the Eternal City; and the church of Rome was the largest and wealthiest church, with a reputation for orthodoxy and charity. It stood without a rival in the West.

Second, despite persecutions of all kinds, the Roman congregation quickly grew in numbers and significance. By the middle of the third century its membership probably approached 30,000; it counted 150 clerics and 1,500 widows and poor people. Then, just as today, size meant influence.

Third, several early Christian writers, beginning with Irenaeus in the second century, referred to Peter and Paul as founders of the church in Rome and to subsequent bishops as successors of the apostles. These roots in the apostolic age were important in a day when gnostic teachers appealed to a secret tradition arising from Christ. Many catholic Christians felt that a list of bishops traced back to Peter and Paul was a sure means of safeguarding the apostolic message.

This respect for Rome's traditions, however, did not prohibit able men like Irenaeus and Cyprian from disagreeing with Rome when they felt the church or her bishop was in error. Up to the time of Constantine history offers no conclusive evidence that the bishop of Rome exercised jurisdiction outside of Rome. Honor, yes; jurisdiction, no.

Rome's growing influence was a part of the increasingly complex church structure emerging in the third and fourth centuries. Church organization developed in two important ways: (1) the authority of church councils and (2) the authority of certain bishops over other bishops.

Councils arose when churches in various areas began sending their pastors (or bishops) to meetings to discuss common problems. These were at first irregular, but during the third century these provincial councils began to meet annually. In theory, the bishops from the churches were all equal, but in practice this was seldom the case. The pastors of the churches established by the apostles possessed an informal spiritual prestige, and the bishops from the larger cities exercised authority in certain matters over the pastors from smaller towns.

As the church grew it adopted, quite naturally, the structure of the empire. This meant that the provincial town of the empire became the episcopal town of the church. Above the provinces in the empire was the metropolis, so bishops in these larger cities soon supervised the bishops in the provinces of that area. Finally, the empire was divided into several major regions, so within the church, people came to think of the church at Rome exercising authority in Italy, Carthage in North Africa, Alexandria in Egypt, Antioch in Syria, and so on.

As the churches within the province thrust out into the countryside, usually through a preaching tour of the bishop, other churches were established to meet the needs of the converts. At first these churches were cared for by clergy sent out from the city. Ministers who served them, however, were not bishops. They were called "priests" from *presbyter*, the Greek word for "elder." These priests in the country parishes were consecrated and controlled by the city bishop, but they could administer the sacraments.

Thus, as the fourth century began, the catholic churches were establishing general policies by regular regional councils of bishops and handling day-to-day affairs under the oversight of bishops in each area.



Presenting Peter Who is this man called Peter?

General councils of the church arose only after Constantine's conversion. To settle major issues troubling the churches the emperor convened synods of bishops from a wide area. Aries, in 314, was a general council of the churches in the West, and Nicaea, in 325, the first General Council of the whole church. The decrees of these and later councils became the law of the church.

The bishop of Rome soared to major importance on the wings of these developments. The Council of Nicea recognized the bishops of Alexandria, Antioch, and Rome as preeminent in their own areas. Jerusalem was granted an honorary primacy. Thus, by 325 the policy of patriarchates, that is, the administration of church affairs by bishops from three or four major cities, was confirmed by conciliar action.

THE IMPERIAL MOVE EAST

In 330 an important new factor appeared. Constantine moved his imperial residence to the New Rome, to the ancient city Byzantium on the Bosphorus. The City of Constantine (Constantinople) shifted the political center of gravity to the East, and as Constantinople's power increased, the political importance of Old Rome declined. Soon the churches looked to the bishop of Constantinople for spiritual and doctrinal leadership equal to that of the other major cities.

Shortly after the Emperor Theodosius entered Constantinople he published legislation making Christianity the state church. Pagan sacrifices were forbidden; the temples were closed, some of them destroyed by Christian fanatics.

In May 381 the new emperor called a general council at Constantinople. As Constantine had done sixty years earlier, Theodosius made a personal appearance at the opening. He wanted to bring order into his Christian church. He invited, however, only bishops from the eastern part of the empire. The Italians were absent, notably Damasus, Bishop of Rome, who did not even send a representative.

What did the emperor want? The confirmation and renewal of the Nicene Creed. That was the basic action of the council, but it also asserted: "The bishop of Constantinople shall take precedence immediately after the bishop of Rome, because his city (Constantinople) is the New Rome."

In the West they realized at once the significance of the confrontation of Old Rome and New Rome and of the bishop of Constantinople's promotion. It was obviously a political move to buttress the episcopal power in the East. Was Rome to be left alone to go its own way?

Damasus, the Bishop of Rome, objected to the Council's action. Does the position of the church and its bishops depend upon the status of some city in the empire? Rome's preeminence, he insisted, does not rest upon any such historical accident, nor on the decrees of a council.

At a synod in Rome the next year, bishops from the West argued: "The Holy Roman Church takes precedence over the other churches, not on the ground of any synodal decisions, but because it was given the primacy by the words of our Lord and Redeemer in the gospel, when he said: 'Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church.'" Thus, we have the first mention of the "primacy of the Roman Church."

The church at Constantinople and the church at Rome were headed in different directions. That was clear by the end of the fourth century. Strains that would eventuate in a complete break between the Christianity of the East and the West were already apparent.

Constantinople relied more and more on its political position and was drawn into the orbit of eastern imperial politics. The more religion and politics became intertwined in the East, the less independent became the patriarch of the capital.

In Rome, the conditions were markedly different. The weakness of the Roman Empire in the West led to a growing independence of the bishop of Rome, the patriarch of the West. The pope had no strong rival. Deprived of the old argument of primacy based on Rome the imperial city, the bishops of Old Rome relied more heavily upon an argument from Scripture and tradition, the primacy of Peter.

Bishop Damasus (366–384) marked the transition to the new day for Old Rome. He was able to fuse the old Roman civic and imperial pride with Christianity. He could point to the noble basilicas dedicated to Peter and Paul. Built by Constantine, the churches rested on the shrines thought to mark the graves of the two saints. "Although the East sent the apostles," said Damasus, "yet because of the merit of their martyrdom, Rome has acquired a superior right to claim them as citizens." Such was the prelude to Leo.

LEO'S CASE FOR PRIMACY



Presenting Peter Who is this man called Peter?

Before his election to the papal office, Leo, a nobleman from a region north of Rome, had been sent by the emperor to Gaul to arbitrate a dispute. When the bishop of Rome died the Roman clergy sent a delegate to inform Leo that the choice of a new bishop had fallen to him.

In the sermon Leo preached on the day of his entrance into office he extolled the “glory of the blessed Apostle Peter ... in whose chair his power lives on and his authority shines forth.” The city that had once enjoyed the favor as capital of the empire, the scene of the martyrdom of Peter and Paul, was now granted a powerful new leader. Leo made his entrance into world history as the Supreme Head of all Christendom. Appealing to the threefold Gospel testimony (Matt. 16:13–19; Luke 22:31, 32; and John 21:15–17) the new pope laid the theoretical foundation for papal primacy: Christ promised to build his church on Peter, the rock for all ages, and the bishops of Rome are his successors in that authority.

This was a complete reversal of the policy of Constantine, who used Christianity as a tool. He had put political and religious pressure on the bishops at the Council of Nicea to preserve the unity of the church, which he considered the cement of the empire. A century later Leo raised the status of the bishop’s office in Rome once and for all. He carried the papacy as far theoretically as it could go. The dynasty of Peter, Prince of the Church, was established, solemnly, decisively.

Leo’s use of the Gospel texts to support Peter’s primacy flew in the face of several difficulties, however: first, the Gospels make clear that preeminence among the followers of Christ was not to be according to the pattern of the princes of the world who exercise lordship and authority. Christ’s disciples must lead by humble service. Second, Peter continued to be notoriously unstable. Even in the Matthew 16:23 passage Jesus rebuked him and called him “Satan” for not understanding “the things that be of God.” Later he denied his Lord in the moment of crisis, and Paul criticized him as an unreliable disciple. Third, the theory assumes that the grant of authority was not to Peter personally but to his office as bishop of Rome, but this identification of authority with a particular office is nowhere evident in the text.

Leo’s argument, however, seemed to be sent from God to an uncertain hour in the Church of Rome. The barbarian attacks in Italy made the imperial court at Ravenna desperate for the support of any authority that might help to hold the empire in the West together. Thus, in 445 the Emperor Valentinian III issued a decree instructing Aetius, the Roman commander in Gaul, to compel the attendance at the papal court of any bishop who refused to come voluntarily. The emperor’s edict turned Leo’s claim into law.

The imperial document ran: “As the primacy of the Apostolic See is based on the tide of the blessed Peter, prince of the episcopal dignity, on the dignity of the city of Rome, and on the decision of the Holy Synod, no illicit steps may be taken against this See to usurp its authority. For the only way to safeguard peace among the churches everywhere is to acknowledge its leadership universally.” Peter’s title was clear; the dignity of the city was history. But just which “Holy Synod” the emperor had in mind is not at all clear.

Leo’s vision of the papacy seemed to have the support not only of the emperor but of the sacred fathers meeting at Chalcedon. A year before the encounter with Attila, in October 451, the suburb of Constantinople, on the Asiatic shore of the Bosphorus, drew 350 bishops to defend the true faith against false interpretations of the life of Jesus Christ.

Even though the emperor had called the council to Chalcedon and visited it personally, the spirit of Pope Leo was dominant. His letters, decisions, and actions were quoted so frequently that sometimes a mere reference to him sufficed for the majority of the bishops to shout jubilantly: “That was the faith of the Fathers, that was the faith of the Apostles.... Peter has spoken through Leo.”

In the historic session on 30 October 451, however, the same council gave the bishop of Constantinople, as bishop of New Rome, authority equal to Leo’s. Constantinople became for the East what Rome was for the West. The sole and independent leadership of the Eastern church by the patriarch of Constantinople was confirmed.

Leo’s representative to the council immediately protested, but the council fathers would not alter their decision. It was an obvious reversal for Leo. Christianity acquired not one but two heads: the Roman Church of the Western Empire, and the Greek Church of the Eastern Empire.

STANDING AMIDST THE RUINS

The Western Empire was a shadow of its former self. Three years after Leo’s successful negotiations with Attila, he faced another test of his diplomacy. A fresh enemy threatened Rome.



Presenting Peter Who is this man called Peter?

This time it was the Vandals, a migrating tribe from Scandinavia, driven southwestward by the Goths advancing from Hungary through Gaul and Spain. The Vandals, expelled for a time from Europe, settled down in the weakest corner of the Roman Empire, in North Africa, and for years they waited for the right moment to strike at Rome.

At the end of March 455, Gaiseric, King of the Vandals, set sail with a hundred ships, manned by Carthaginian sailors. His army landed north of the Tiber, creating panic in Rome. Rumors swirled about that Gaiseric intended to burn the city. Many tried to flee. The imperial troops mutinied. While attempting to escape, the Emperor Maximus was slain by one of his own bodyguards. His body was dragged through the streets, torn to pieces, and thrown in the river. No general took over the defense; the troops were disorganized. On 2 June 455 the Vandals entered Rome, meeting no resistance.

At the city gate, Leo met Gaiseric. He was leading not soldiers but priests. The Vandal king was about sixty-five years of age; Leo about the same. An illegitimate offspring of an old Germanic family and a nobleman's son from Tuscany, Gaiseric had been lamed by a fall from his horse, but his reputation as master of the western Mediterranean preceded him.

When they faced each other, Leo begged for mercy. He urged the king to restrain his troops; he implored him not to burn the city. He offered money. Geiseric nodded silently. Then, spurring his horse away, he called out to the pope: "Fourteen days' looting!"

The Vandals plundered the city systematically, palace by palace. Insignia, gold and silver plate, anything belonging to the emperor was fair game. Temple after temple was sacked. The gilded roof of the Capitol was carried off, and the sacred vessels from the Temple of Solomon, brought from Jerusalem. Equestrian figures, marble and bronze columns, images of the gods—everything was loaded on the Vandals' ships.

The Vandals took human booty too: first, political prisoners, like the empress and her daughters, then senators and members of the Roman aristocracy to be held for ransom. For fourteen days the Vandals occupied the city. Then the ships were loaded and the expeditionary force withdrew to Carthage.

After the Vandals were gone, the Romans held a solemn service of thanksgiving. Rome had not been burned down, massacre had been avoided, and only a few Christian churches had been plundered.

All the Romans knew what their bishop had done for them, but only a few of the faithful were present for the service. They were still terrified by the memory of the foreign soldiers and the constant looting. Not a single house had been spared. Would Rome ever recover from such a catastrophe?

Leo reminded his audience of the "days of our chastisement and liberation." He longed for his voice to carry through the walls of the church, out into the streets, into the hearts of those who should have been present.

"One is ashamed to say this, and yet one dares not be silent. You value the devils higher than the Apostles. Who has restored security to the city? Who has liberated it, preserved it from massacre? Turn to the Lord, acknowledge the miracles he has manifestly wrought on our behalf, and ascribe our liberation not, as the godless do, to the influence of the stars but to the ineffable mercy of the Almighty, who has softened the rage of the barbarians."

Though he had saved Rome for a second time, Leo made no reference to himself. It wasn't really necessary. He had assumed the old heathen title, *Pontifex Maximus*, the high priest of religion throughout the empire, and everyone understood. Leo, not the emperor, had shouldered responsibility for the Eternal City. Peter had come to power.

Suggestions for Further Reading

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Jesus and His Witnesses as Prophets in Luke—Acts

¹⁷ Shelley, B. L. (1995). [*Church history in plain language*](#) (Updated 2nd ed., pp. 131–140). Dallas, TX: Word Pub.



Presenting Peter Who is this man called Peter?

The author of the two-part work Luke—Acts uses three main narrative strategies to portray Jesus and His witnesses as prophets. First, characters like Jesus, John the Baptist, and the apostles Peter and Paul consistently act like Israel's prophets. Also, their words or deeds sometimes call a specific prophet to mind. Additionally, other characters in the narrative recognize them as prophets.

Approaches

This tendency in Luke—Acts has been examined from various perspectives in recent decades. Literary critics have identified parallels between Jesus and Moses in the Gospel of Luke that contribute to Jesus' portrayal as a prophet who twice experiences rejection from His own people. They have also highlighted that Jesus' prophecies of Jerusalem's doom echo the oracles of prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Luke's Gospel firmly places Jesus within Israel's prophetic tradition: when Jerusalem rejects God's prophets—in this case, Jesus—it sows the seeds of its own destruction.

Additionally, the similarities between Luke's Jesus and Elijah and Elisha suggest that Luke may have used the Elijah—Elisha story as a prototype. This finds theological support, as both the Elijah and Elisha stories and Samuel's birth and infancy narrative figure prominently in Luke's construction of salvation history in the story of Jesus.

Prophetic Characters

The first prophetic character in Luke—Acts is John the Baptist. Like Samuel, John is born to a barren woman in answer to his parents' prayers (Luke 1:7, 13; compare 1 Sam 1:2, 5, 10–11). Other parallels with Samuel include John's Nazirite vows (Luke 1:15; compare 1 Sam 1:11, 22) and his growth (Luke 1:80; compare 1 Sam 2:21, 26). Filled with the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:15), John prophesies the coming of the Messiah as an adult (Luke 1:41; 3:16–17). Both Zechariah and Jesus recognize John as a prophet (Luke 1:76; 7:26).

Luke also compares the infant Jesus to Samuel. Like Samuel's mother Hannah, Mary glorifies God for His mercy to the poor (Luke 1:46–55; compare 1 Sam 2:1–10) and brings her son, along with an offering, to the temple (Luke 2:22–23; compare 1 Sam 1:24). Like Samuel, Jesus grows in favor with God (Luke 2:40, 52; compare 1 Sam 2:26). Filled with the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:22; 4:1), Jesus pronounces prophetic judgments as an adult (Luke 3:19; 13:1–5), knows people's thoughts (Luke 6:8; 7:39–40; 9:47; 11:17), and foretells future events (Luke 10:19; 12:50; 13:32–33; 17:25). His prophecies concerning Jerusalem (Luke 19:41–44; 21:20–24; 23:29–30) elicit comparison with some of Israel's prophets, since they echo phrases in the Old Testament (e.g., Deut 32:35; Hos 9:7; 10:8, 14; Zech 12:3; Isa 29:3; Jer 6:15; 21:7; 26:10; Ezek 32:9). These comparisons convince people that Jesus is a prophet (Luke 7:16; 9:8, 19; 20:6; 24:19).

Luke's portrayal of Jesus resembles Samuel, Hosea, Zechariah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, as well as Elijah and Moses. The parallels between Jesus and Elijah are particularly evident. Like Elijah, Jesus is a miracle-working prophet. He heals many, including a paralytic (Luke 5:17–26), and resuscitates a widow's only son (Luke 7:11–17; compare 1 Kgs 17:17–24). He also ascends into heaven (Luke 24:50–51; Acts 1:9–11; compare 2 Kgs 2:9–12).

In Acts, the comparison of Elijah with Jesus is extended to Peter and Paul. Like Elisha, Peter and Paul receive the spirit of their mentor (Acts 2:1–4; 9:17; 13:9; compare 2 Kgs 2:15) and perform His miracles, healing paralytics (Acts 3:1–10; 14:8–10) and raising the dead (Acts 9:36–43; 20:7–12; compare 2 Kgs 4:32–37). In addition, Luke—Acts portrays Peter and Paul as prophets in their own right. They experience prophetic calls (Luke 5:1–11; Acts 9:1–9) and see visions (Acts 10:9–16; 16:6–10). Each pronounces prophetic judgments (Acts 5:1–11; 8:14–24; 13:4–12) and foretells future events (Acts 5:9; 20:23). Peter and Paul inherit the prophetic ministry of Jesus—which, like the ministry of Elijah and Elisha, extends through them to the Gentiles (Luke 4:25–27; Acts 10; 13–20).

Acts also makes it quite explicit that Jesus is the prophet like Moses as foretold in Deuteronomy 18:15 (Acts 3:22–23; 7:37). By comparing Jesus with Moses, Luke illustrates a theme articulated repeatedly (Luke 4:24; 13:33–34; 24:29–30; Acts 7:51–52): Israel consistently rejects God's prophets. Stephen's speech particularly shows how both Jesus and Moses are rejected not just once, but twice. Moses saves an Israelite only to suffer rebuke (Exod 2:11–14). After this first rejection, he returns to lead the people out of Egypt and into the wilderness (Exod 4:27–14:31), where they worship a golden calf (Exod 32:1–6). Similarly, Jesus comes to save a people who reject Him (Acts 3:13–15; 7:34–36, 52). Jesus' apostles then make a second offer of salvation (Acts 3:17–26)—an offer that is also rejected (Acts 7:38–60).

JOCELYN MCWHIRTER¹⁸

Lesson 9—Openness to Others

¹⁸ McWhirter, J. (2012, 2016). [Jesus and His Witnesses as Prophets in Luke—Acts](#). In *Faithlife Study Bible*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.



Presenting Peter Who is this man called Peter?

Have you ever had the humbling experience of taking the time to talk with someone, when you really didn't feel you had the time, and then hear that person say, "Oh, thank you for taking the time to talk with me! I feel as though a great load has been lifted. You have made my day!"? Humbling indeed. Your openness to someone in need cost you so little, but for that person, every minute you gave them was golden.

Being open and approachable to others is not the easiest of leadership traits to develop, for there is a tendency in all of us to want to protect ourselves—to be closed, defensive, and even judgmental.

To be open means to be vulnerable, having the ability to humbly share one's own struggles and victories and to be empathetic toward others. A leader who is open hides nothing and avoids being defensive. He or she is accessible, available, and transparent.

Pride and exclusivity are traits opposite to openness. They prevent leaders from developing nurturing relationships with those they lead and often form leaders who work at projecting power by whatever means they might, even through intimidation.

Some leadership models used in the corporate world make it next to impossible for leaders to function with openness. Such models distance the leaders from those being led. Developing personal relationships under such models is difficult.

Trained lay leadership can help to provide a more approachable and accessible extension of pastoral care under the corporate model. But when the skills of trained lay leadership are inadequate to deal with the more complex spiritual issues, then there must be made available to the congregation trained pastoral staff to minister to those areas.

There is probably no perfect leadership model available to the church today. But those who aspire to be Christlike in their leadership should strive to be open, approachable people.

OPENNESS MODELED IN CHRIST

The Gospels are full of accounts that reveal the openness and approachableness of Christ. People with insurmountable problems and physical needs followed Him wherever He went. He took the time to listen to their needs and respond to them compassionately. So secure was He in His own personal identity and mission that He could make Himself available to the people. Instead of distancing Himself, He invited them to come to Him with all their problems. He said, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28).

The following Bible passages provide insights into the openness of Jesus. After reading the passages, record in the respective columns the setting and the manner in which Jesus responded to the need and how that response revealed His openness to the people.

	Setting	Manner of Jesus' Response	How Jesus' Openness Was Revealed
	Matt. 15:32–39		
	Matt. 20:29–34		
	Mark 7:24–30		
	Mark 10:9, 13–16		
	Luke 19:1–9		
	John 4:3–30, 39–41		

FAITH ALIVE

The following will help you learn to apply in your ministry some lessons from the above examples of Jesus' accessibility to the people.



Presenting Peter Who is this man called Peter?

Feeding the Four Thousand:

Prior to the miracle of the feeding of the four thousand, how much time had Jesus spent with the multitude and how must He have felt physically after that length of time?

What did the disciples learn about leadership as a result of their participation in this miracle?

How can you apply the lessons they learned to your own ministry?

Two Blind Men:

What can you learn from the persistence of the two blind men?

As a leader, have you ever become impatient with someone who was persistent in his or her desire to receive ministry when the circumstances at the moment did not lend to giving this person the attention he or she felt was needed?

What does Jesus' response to the blind men teach us?

Syro-Phoenician Woman:

What do we learn in this story about being responsive to people whose needs are so desperate that they seem to violate the rules of protocol to get help?

Do you desire to be the kind of person that someone who is in critical need would feel free to call for help, even at what seems to be the most inopportune time? If so, note any ways you may need to change so that you might become more approachable.

Jesus Blessing the Children:

Why do you suppose the disciples wanted to keep the little children away from Jesus?

What does this tell you about their understanding of a leader's accessibility at that point in their discipleship training?

In what ways do you think spiritual leaders should demonstrate their love and concerns for children today?

Jesus Visiting Zacchaeus's House:

What lesson can be learned from Jesus taking the initiative to invite Himself to Zacchaeus's house?

How would you handle the criticism Jesus received for going to his home?

What about the time element involved in Jesus' visit, and what message about ministry does this communicate to us?

The Woman of Samaria:

In what ways was this an unusual encounter?

What is Jesus teaching us about our accessibility to people who are considered outcasts in society?

OPENNESS MODELED IN PAUL

Ordinarily the apostle Paul did not boast about his apostolic gifts or the successes of his ministry. Nor did he boast of the incredible sufferings he endured in his service to Christ. No other apostle was more gifted than Paul, nor did any of them suffer to the extent that he did. But when writing his second letter to the Corinthians, he found it necessary to become "boastful" to the point of appearing foolish in doing so. In this epistle, Paul revealed details about the sufferings he endured as an apostle. He also reminded the Corinthians of his sacrificial ministry to them. All of this personal revelation was necessary so that the Christians at Corinth might compare his calling and experiences with those who claimed to be apostles but who, in fact, were not.

To discover the degree of vulnerability demonstrated by Paul to the church at Corinth, read 2 Corinthians 11 and 12, and then from the following divisions within those chapters (listed in the left column), record the struggles of this great leader in the right column.

2 Corinthians

Paul's Vulnerability

His Struggles

11:1-4

11:5-15

11:16-21



Presenting Peter
Who is this man called Peter?

11:22–33

12:1–6

12:7–10

12:11–13

12:14–21

OPENNESS TO WISE COUNSEL

Solomon saw the value of wise counsel when he wrote, “Without counsel, plans go awry, but in the multitude of counselors they are established” (Prov. 15:22).

One of the causes for failure in leadership is the unwillingness to be open to wise counsel. Costly mistakes can be avoided when one will seek the advice of experienced, successful leaders.

Openness to wise counsel will lead to accountability. Persons in places of leadership must be accountable to others. Pastors are accountable to church boards, their congregations, and ecclesiastical overseers. They do not operate independently. Those in places of spiritual leadership should learn to be team players as well as leaders. Regularly scheduled meetings, retreats, and training sessions provide opportunities for members of the leadership team to receive wise counsel and to be accountable to one another.

MOSES RECEIVES COUNSEL

An example of a great spiritual leader who is open to wise counsel is found in Exodus 18. Read the entire chapter and then answer the following questions.

How would you describe the relationship between Moses and his father-in-law, Jethro?

What were the qualities Jethro possessed that would give him the right to offer counsel to Moses?

What is the value of open-minded dialogue in counsel?

Describe Moses’ response to wise counsel, how he personally benefited by it, and how the people benefited.

What negative results might have happened had not Moses been open to receive his father-in-law’s wise counsel?

FAITH ALIVE

To help you apply the truths of “openness” to your ministry, respond to the following items:
Rate your first reaction to wise counsel.

Defensive

Threatened

Open

If you are defensive or feel threatened, twhy do you feel like this? ¹⁹

¹⁹ Hayford, J. W., & Rosenberger, H. (1994). *Appointed to Leadership: God’s Principles for Spiritual Leaders*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.