

Jesus Builds – the book of Acts

Lesson Fourteen | Acts 11:1-26

Background

The book of Acts was written by the physician, Luke, as a continuation of his Gospel. Jesus said he would build his church and Acts is the earliest history we have about that. It begins with the Ascension on Mount Olivet and then tracks the development of the early church with a particular focus on Peter in the early chapters and Paul in the later chapters, taking us to the early AD 60s.

Context

One of the best ways to learn history is to focus on the major turning points. Luke's history of the early church that we call the book of Acts does exactly this. The first major turning point was the fulfillment of Pentecost in Acts 2, when the Spirit was given to the believers and thousands more believers were added. The martyrdom of Stephen was a turning point that began pushing Christianity out from Jerusalem. The next major turning point is the intentional evangelism of Gentiles.

Bible Study Tip

Know the major history turning points in Biblical history.

Turning Points

1. We have a chapter break between Acts 10:48 and 11:1, but the story here is seamless. The salvation of Cornelius and other Gentiles with him astounded the Jewish believers who were with Peter in Caesarea at Cornelius' home (Acts 10:45). What occurred there needed to be transmitted back to the church in Jerusalem.
2. **News Travels Fast:** Chapter 11 opens with the summary statement that quickly the apostles and other Jewish Christians in Judea heard about Cornelius and the other Gentiles welcoming the gospel message. (Acts 11:1)
3. **Peter Scolded:** Peter traveled back to Jerusalem only to be scolded by "those that stressed circumcision" because he ate with Gentiles. (Acts 11:2-3) **NOTE:** This very issue will replay later in Peter's life when he is in Antioch, as recounted by the apostle Paul in Galatians 2:11-16.
4. **The Cornelius Story Recounted:** In the face of the opposition Peter found in Jerusalem, he recounted the entire story about Cornelius. (Acts 11:4-17) The **key verse** is Acts 4:17 as it captures the point of Peter's recitation — Peter tells his opposition everything that happened with Cornelius was God's doing and Peter's role was at God's direction.
 - Have you had times when God's people opposed you doing what God led you to do?
5. Peter's defense was convincing and his Jewish brothers in Jerusalem accepted that "God has granted repentance resulting in life even to the Gentiles." (Acts 11:18)
6. **Turning Point — Intentional Evangelism of Gentiles:** The martyrdom of Stephen pushed Christians out of Jerusalem but they only shared the gospel with Jews. (11:19) But now Jewish believers were coming to Antioch (in ancient Syria but modern day Turkey, located along the Orontes River) to preach to the Greeks. (Acts 11:20) This ministry was fruitful and the church in Jerusalem even sent Barnabas ("son of encouragement") to minister there. (Acts 11:21-22) Then Paul came and ministered there for one year. (Acts 11:25-26)
7. **Turning Point — At Antioch They Were First Called Christians.** The word "Christian" indicates belonging to the party of Christ. The term is only used here and in Acts 26:28 and 1 Peter 4:16.
 - Why is this a turning point?