



February 10, 2016
Acts 11:1-30
Acts 12:1-19
Pastor Gary Hamrick

Exegetical Study

1. **Acts 11:1-18** - *"The apostles and the brothers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him and said, 'You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.' Peter began and explained everything to them precisely as it had happened: 'I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. I saw something like a large sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to where I was. I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, reptiles, and birds of the air. Then I heard a voice telling me, 'Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.' I replied, 'Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.' The voice spoke from heaven a second time, 'Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.' This happened three times, and then it was all pulled up to heaven again. Right then three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea stopped at the house where I was staying. The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered the man's house. He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, 'Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.' As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. Then I remembered what the Lord had said: 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God? When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, 'So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life.' "*

- a. Pastor Gary's February 3, 2016, message and study guide provide a complete

overview of [Acts 10](#).

- b. Peter returned to Jerusalem after meeting with Cornelius.
- c. Upon Peter's return, Peter found out that the news of his meeting with Cornelius, a Gentile, had caused an uproar among some of the Jewish Believers.
 - i. It's important to remember that the Church was made up of Jews for the first ten years.
- d. It's a sad reflection of these Jewish Believers and their prejudice in that they didn't say, "Praise God for the wonderful news that Gentiles are coming to faith in Jesus!"
- e. The Jewish Believers were incensed that Peter dared to even go into the home of a Gentile, much less eat a meal and share fellowship with Gentiles.
- f. Pastor Gary said, "The common Jew in [that] day believed that the sole purpose of a Gentile in the world was simply to be fodder for the fires of hell! ... In fact, Pharisees [would] thank God that they were not one of three things: a woman, a dog, or a Gentile. ... In essence, what Peter did by going into the home of a Gentile and eating with them was that he was acknowledging his oneness in fellowship with them. [These] believing Jews [had] trouble with this because they don't understand what Peter had come to understand, so Peter was going to help them understand by recounting for them the vision and the circumstances from [[Acts 10](#)]. ... This [was a] completely brand-new experience for these Jews... and they accepted [Peter's explanation in a wonderful way]. ... Be careful that you don't write people off, especially people who don't look like you. ... [When you think this or say this], you are actually saying something about God. You are saying that [God] is not capable of saving people who you think aren't savable. ... Who are we to say who God can [or] cannot save or will or will not save? ... God can work miracles to change the hearts of people, and he has done it and he is doing it, and he will always do it for his glory."

2. [Acts 11:19-30](#) - *"Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord. News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord. Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of*

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

- a. The Jewish Christians from Jerusalem, who left during the time of persecution, scattered as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, Cyrene, and Antioch.
 - i. Phoenicia was a coastal region on the Mediterranean Sea.
 1. Today the area would primarily be in Libya.
 - ii. Cyprus is an island in the Mediterranean Sea.
 - iii. Today Antioch would be in Turkey, but at this point in history, it was in Syria.
 1. Antioch was the third most populated city in the Roman Empire at this time.
 2. It’s estimated that as many as one million people lived in Antioch.
 - iv. Cyrene was a city located on the northern coast of Africa.
 - b. Believing Jews journeyed from Cyprus and Cyrene to Antioch to start the first missionary effort to evangelize Gentiles.
 - c. Barnabas
 - i. He traveled from Jerusalem to Antioch, and he witnessed firsthand the remarkable things the Lord was doing there.
 - ii. He left Antioch to meet with Paul in Tarsus, where Paul had been about ten years.
 - iii. Barnabas and Paul traveled to Antioch to participate in the work of the ministry.
 - d. Antioch was the first place that Believers were called Christians.
 - i. Previously, Christians were known by various titles.
 1. Disciples
 - a. **Acts 1:15** – *“In those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples...”* (New King James Version – NKJV)
 2. Witnesses
 - a. **Acts 5:32** – *“We are witnesses...”*
 3. Brothers
 - a. **Acts 6:3** – *“Brothers, choose for yourselves seven men...”*
 4. Saints
 - a. **Acts 9:13** – *“... the harm he has done to your saints...”*
 5. Followers of the Way
 - a. **Acts 9:2** – *“... belonged to the Way...”*
3. **Acts 12:1-19** – *“It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. He had James, the brother of John, put*

to death with the sword. When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover. So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him. The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. 'Quick, get up!' he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrists. Then the angel said to him, 'Put on your clothes and sandals.' And Peter did so. 'Wrap your cloak around you and follow me,' the angel told him. Peter followed him out of prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision. They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him. Then Peter came to himself and said, 'Now I know without a doubt that the Lord sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches and from everything the Jewish people were anticipating.' When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying. Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer the door. When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, 'Peter is at the door!' 'You're out of your mind,' they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, 'It must be his angel.' But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. 'Tell James [the half-brother of Jesus] and the brothers about this,' he said, and then he left for another place. In the morning, there was no small commotion among the soldiers as to what had become of Peter. After Herod had a thorough search made for him and did not find him, he cross-examined the guards and ordered that they be executed."

- a. Herod Agrippa I was the grandson of Herod the Great.
 - i. Herod the Great was the one who gave the order for all of the baby boys in the vicinity of Bethlehem to be killed.
 - ii. Herod Agrippa was just as bloodthirsty as his grandfather, and he purposed to do all he could to kill Christians.
 - iii. He ordered that James, the brother of John, be beheaded.
 1. The account of James and John seeking to sit at Jesus' right hand in the coming kingdom is found in [Mark 10:35-45](#).
- b. Peter was arrested and jailed.
 - i. Peter was guarded by sixteen soldiers.
- c. Prayer

- i. Pastor Gary said, “Insert your situation [into [Acts 12:5](#)], and let this be a reminder for us to be a praying people as a church. ... I love that part [that the *‘church was earnestly praying’*] because no matter what you might be going through, may we be a praying church to lift each other up. [Prayer] is the strength of the church.”
 - 1. The Greek word for earnestly is ektenos,¹ which means to stretch a muscle to its limit.
 - 2. Pastor Gary said, “Think of prayer like [this]... it’s earnestly praying, seeking God [and] being stretched in our faith, coming to [the Lord], trusting in [the Lord], begging... pouring out our hearts to [the Lord].”
- d. Peter was going to be killed the following day and yet, here he was, chained to Roman soldiers, sleeping as though nothing was wrong!
 - i. Pastor Gary said, “Have you ever been anxious about something, probably a little less than being executed the next day, and [you] couldn’t sleep at all, [and you tossed and turned all night long] and you still couldn’t get to sleep? ... [We need to ask the Lord to give us the same kind of peace that Peter had, no matter what is going on.]”
- e. Praying Christians
 - i. When Peter left the prison, he went to the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark.²
 - ii. Pastor Gary said, “[Isn’t it odd that] they had more faith to think that this was the guardian angel for Peter, than they believed that it was Peter himself! [These] are the earnestly praying people... and yet, when Rhoda [told them Peter was at the door, they didn’t believe her! ... This is what this says to me. God can answer our prayers even if we have little, tiny faith. These people were earnestly praying, but they weren’t earnestly expecting. If they had been earnestly expecting, when Rhoda came to them, they would have said, ‘See, this is what we have been praying for! Of course, Peter’s at the door!’ ... I love the fact that God is not obligated based on our level of faith. God does great and wonderful things if we have great faith, little faith, or no faith. God is sovereign, and he wants us to approach the throne of grace, and he wants us to pour our hearts out to him, but [his] answer is not dependent upon [us]. The answer is dependent upon God and his timing and his perfect will. ... Too many people think that the outcome is on your [our backs]. It’s not. ... God answered their prayer even when they weren’t expecting [the answer].”
 - 1. [Hebrews 4:16](#) - *“Let us then approach the throne of grace with*

¹ <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G1619&t=NIV>

² <https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/dictionary/viewtopic.cfm?topic=IT0005811>

confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

f. Peter

- i. This is the last time Peter's whereabouts are known.
- ii. Church tradition tells us that Peter was crucified upside down, and his wife was martyred beside him.
- iii. The reason we know Peter was to be executed is because in that day if he allowed a prisoner to escape, a Roman soldier, received the same punishment as that prisoner.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the 1984 New International Version (NIV)