



Lesson 5:

Peter and the Spreading Word

Background Note: Peter has moved out of Jerusalem and is traveling as an itinerant minister to the towns of Lydda, Joppa and Caesarea. Look at Map 12: Apostles' Early Travels (in the back of most NIV Bibles) to get a feel for where Peter is ministering. Peter has responded like Christ in the face of sickness and death. This lesson will examine how Peter will respond to a different challenge to his ministry.

It would be difficult to overstate how wide the gulf of hostility was between Jews and Gentiles at this time in history. Gentiles were viewed as unclean and outside the covenant God had with His chosen people Israel. No Orthodox Jew would enter the home of a Gentile even if he was "God fearing" meaning that he had accepted monotheism and the ethical standards of Judaism. The question this week's lesson addresses is, "Will the racial, religious and ethnic prejudices of Christ's followers prove to be an obstacle to Jesus' mission to save the world?"

Read Acts 10-12

1. **Read Acts 10: 1- 8.** Cornelius was a noncommissioned officer in the Roman army that occupied Palestine -- the home of the apostles. Romans were hated by the Jews because they were Gentiles, occupiers of God's Promised Land and worshippers of false gods. With that in mind, what do you find interesting in these verses?
2. **Read Acts 10: 9- 23.** Why do you think the Lord chose to work in Cornelius' and Peter's life through visions? (He met Saul on the road to Damascus this way too.)
3. **(Thought Question)** How does **Leviticus 11** help you to understand Peter's reaction to his vision? Read Jesus' words in **Mark 7:14-23**, since God does not contradict Himself, how do Jesus' words help to clarify what God's purpose was in establishing food restrictions for the people of Israel?
4. **Read Acts 10:24- 48.** Which verses reveal how the Spirit has helped Peter rethink and replace misdirected beliefs? Can you share a time when the Spirit did a similar work in your own life?
5. As you consider the Spirit's work in this episode with Cornelius and Peter and in the episode of Saul's conversion, what conclusions can you draw concerning how the Spirit is and will be working in your life?

6. **Read 11:1 – 18.** God brings change and enlargement of understanding through men and women who have vision. How do you see that principle being realized in these verses?

7. **Read 11: 19 – 30.** Take time to locate the places named on the apostles travel map. Barnabas was glad to find evidence that God's grace had spread to followers in Antioch. What lesson of discipleship do you learn as you consider Barnabas' plan to bring concentrated teaching to these believers?

8. Apparently so many people in Antioch were trusting Christ that the townspeople coined a new name for them. These Christ followers or disciples were first called "*Christian*" meaning "*belonging to Christ*" or "*part of Christ*" at Antioch. Compare and contrast what it meant to be a "Christian" in Antioch to what it means for you to be a "Christian" in Richmond.

Note: King Herod (the grandson of the King Herod who ruled when Jesus was born) was Jewish by race but not by conviction, he thought the Jewish Christians were divisive and troublesome to the orderly rule of Judea, so he began a persecution.

9. **(Thought Question) Read Acts 12.** The most fruitful thinking we can do is to think about God--His character and His ways. As you consider that God in His sovereignty chose not to strike Herod down prior to the beheading of James or prior to the imprisonment of Peter. When you realize He did not spare James as He did Peter, what helpful truths about God bolster your faith when faced with these kinds of circumstances?

Closing: Take a moment to ask God the Holy Spirit what He wants to change or enlarge in your thinking or believing—what would have been in the sheet that you would have scorned?