



'Acts' - Extra Teaching Points #13

Acts 11:1 – 12:5 (NASB)

Pages 170-184 in 'Acts For Everyone' (Part 1) by N. T. Wright

Acts 11:1-18

Now the apostles and the brethren who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. ² And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, **those who were circumcised took issue with him,** ³ saying, "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them." ⁴ But Peter began speaking and proceeded to explain to them in orderly sequence, saying, ⁵ "I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, an object coming down like a great sheet lowered by four corners from the sky; and it came right down to me, ⁶ and when I had fixed my gaze on it and was observing it I saw the four-footed animals of the earth and the wild beasts and the crawling creatures and the birds of the air. ⁷ "I also heard a voice saying to me, 'Get up, Peter; kill and eat.' ⁸ "But I said, 'By no means, Lord, for nothing unholy or unclean has ever entered my mouth.' ⁹ "But a voice from heaven answered a second time, 'What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy.' ¹⁰ "This happened three times, and everything was drawn back up into the sky. ¹¹ "And behold, at that moment three men appeared at the house in which we were staying, having been sent to me from Caesarea. ¹² "The Spirit told me to go with them without misgivings. These six brethren also went with me and we entered the man's house. ¹³ "And he reported to us how he had seen the angel standing in his house, and saying, 'Send to Joppa and have Simon, who is also called Peter, brought here; ¹⁴ and he will speak words to you by which you will be saved, you and all your household.' ¹⁵ "And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as He did upon us at the beginning. ¹⁶ "And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, '**John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.**' ¹⁷ "Therefore if God gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?" ¹⁸ When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, "Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life."

Q: Who is this group that Luke describes as "those who were circumcised", and what was their problem?

- All Jewish men (even in the church) were circumcised, so Luke wouldn't use this phrase unless he was talking about a smaller group within the Jerusalem church.
- Apparently this was a self-appointed pressure group within the church.
 - This is probably the same group we will read about causing trouble in [Acts 15:1](#) who were saying, "*Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.*"
 - No doubt, these are also the same people Paul wrote about in [Gal. 2:12](#).
- Their problem was they were teaching people that they had to become Jews first before they could become Christians.

Q: When these men accuse Peter, how does he answer them?

- He tells the whole story of what happened, he quotes what Jesus had to say on the subject, and then explains what he concluded God wanted him to do.

Q: What can we learn from this?

- There have always been, and will always be, self-appointed pressure groups who want to tell you what you should or shouldn't be doing.
 - When challenged, we shouldn't get offended or quickly conform to the critics.
 - We should do what Peter did:
 - Tell the whole story
 - Quote whatever scripture might apply to the challenge
 - Do whatever seems to be the most pleasing to God... *not the pressure group!*
- "There is a constant need, particularly among Christian leaders, to be anchored in prayer, humility, and deep attention to the word of God; and particularly (as here) the words of Jesus." P. 174

Acts 11:19-30

So then **those who were scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone.** ²⁰ But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks also, **preaching the Lord Jesus.** ²¹ And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord. ²² The news about them reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch. ²³ Then when he arrived and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord; ²⁴ for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord. ²⁵ And he left for Tarsus to look for Saul; ²⁶ and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. ²⁷ Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. ²⁸ One of them named Agabus stood up and began to indicate by the Spirit that **there would certainly be a great famine all over the world.** And this took place in the reign of Claudius. ²⁹ And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea. ³⁰ And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders.

Q: Why did Barnabas want Saul to come to Antioch?

- We aren't told, so no one knows for sure. My guess is that it had something to do with the fact that some disciples were only taking the gospel to the Jews, while others were *also* taking it to the Gentiles.
- Saul was an expert in the Old Testament, and knew better than anyone how to explain from scripture how God always intended to accept the Gentiles.
 - In Acts 9:20-22, Saul immediately started preaching the "Son of God" and the "Christ", which were references to [2 Samuel 7:12-16](#) and [Psa. 2:1-8](#). Those titles and the passages they are found in prophesied that God would give the nations to His Son.
- It is worth noting that Barnabas had the humility to realize he wasn't the man for the job!

Q: When Agabus tells the disciples at Antioch that a famine was coming, why would they think about sending a contribution to the disciples in Judea instead of just making plans to take care of their church?

- There were many disciples in Judea who questioned, even rejected the disciples in Antioch because they were Gentiles (uncircumcised). Yet, the disciples in Antioch knew they were all part of the same family, and so they had a responsibility to help; not just look out for themselves.
- This probably is also rooted in their commitment to God's mission to preach the gospel.
 - If we understand that we are on the same team, and the "name on the front of the jersey is way more important than the name on the back", then we will do whatever we can to keep our players on the field!

Acts 12:1-5

Now about that time Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church in order to mistreat them. ² And **he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword.** ³ When he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. Now it was during the days of Unleavened Bread. ⁴ When he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out before the people. ⁵ So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God.

Q: Why would Herod have James killed with a sword instead of having him stoned like Stephen?

- It likely indicates that Herod thought, or wanted the people to think, that Christianity was a *political* threat, as opposed to a *religious* threat.
- Christianity was now threatening not just the religious establishment, but the political one as well.

- “As we shall see at the close of this chapter, Luke has told the story in such a way as to leave this first half with a direct showdown between the official, reigning ‘king of the Jews’, and the unofficial king, Jesus the Messiah. The good news of his kingly rule has been announced in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria; the local king who would be the most threatened by this has done his worst, and it hasn’t worked. Now, Luke is suggesting, it is time to see what will happen when Jesus is announced as Lord of the world.” P. 183
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Follow Up Assignment

Q: Have you encountered “pressure groups”?

- If so, what pressure were they applying, and how did you respond to them?

Q: If, for some reason, you were relocated to a place where there were no church, (or no church like the one you’re attending now), what would happen to your faith?

- Would it weaken, go dormant, or possibly die?
- Would it grow and spread?

Q: What do you need to do now to be able to have your faith grow and spread to others, if, in the future, you were to leave this church?