
a ***Grace Notes*** course

The Acts of the Apostles

an expositional study

by Warren Doud

Lesson 210: **Acts 11:1-21**

ACTS, Lesson 210, Acts 11:1-21

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Acts 11:1-21**Acts 11:1**

11:1 And the apostles and brethren that were in Judaea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God.

apostles and brethren

The people referred to here are the other 11 apostles and all of the other Christian brethren in the churches of Judea.

in Judea (kata thn Ioudian)

“throughout all Judea”, probably meaning all of Palestine. There were many churches in the region by this time, as the witness was going out steadily farther and farther from Jerusalem.

that the Gentiles had also received the word of God

When the Samaritans were reached for Christ, during the ministry of Philip, this was certainly good news; but the Samaritans were, at least, half Jewish. Cornelius, and his family and friends, were Roman, *not Jewish at all!* So this sensational news spread like wildfire (given the modes of communication in those days: mail and travelers).

At this point in the study, you should re-read chapter 10 and the accompanying notes, to review how this event unfolded.

Imagine the various kinds of reaction among the Jewish Christians.

When we study the situation on Crete when the Jewish and Greek Christians were trying to co-exist in the local churches there (Epistle to Titus), we see what the legalistic Judaizers there were trying to promote. From Titus 1 and Titus 3 we see that some really confrontational Jewish believers were teaching Jewish fables and traditions. The situation was so bad that Paul told Titus that he might have to excommunicate some people, if they would not listen to Titus’s grace teaching.

Acts 11:2

11:2 And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him,

And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem

Soon after leaving Cornelius in Caesarea, Peter returned to Jerusalem, where his first task is to report to the other apostles and the church about the whole incident.¹

(Some manuscripts have an expanded text which indicates that Peter spent a long time on his way to Jerusalem, although we don’t know how long that was.)

Topic: Chronology**Topic: Jerusalem***they that were of the circumcision*

Some commentators interpret the phrase “those who were circumcised” to refer to some separate party of Judaizers in the Christian church.

Later, in Acts 15:5 Luke will refer to a group of Christian Pharisees who were insisting on circumcision for Christians; but there is nothing to suggest these people are meant here.

Luke uses this phrase simply to refer to Jewish Christians. In fact, he had used the same phrase in Acts 10:45 to refer to the six Jewish men who accompanied Peter to Caesarea.

Topic: Circumcision*contended with him*

The phrase “contended with him” comes from the same word translated “doubting nothing” in Acts 10:20 and 11:12. It means “to make a difference”.²

This is a word that bears careful study, because we want to know as much as we can about the attitude of the men who were questioning Peter. Were these men being confrontational? Were they severely criticizing Peter because of what he had done with Cornelius? Or were they open minded, expressing sincere doubts, asking honest questions about this extraordinary situation?

Gill says, “They ‘litigated the point, disputed the matter with him, and quarreled with him...’”

¹ Baker, Acts 11

² Bible Exposition Commentary, Acts 11.

Barnes goes farther: They “disputed; reprov’d him; charged him with being in fault.”

And Clarke is the strongest of all: “He is now called to account for his conduct, which they judged to be reprehensible...”

But – the definition and common usage of this word does not demand that we take it in these strong terms. There is no need to think that the Jewish leaders were reprov’g Peter or judging him for some wrongdoing.

“contended” is **diakrinonto**, imp. mid. indic. 3p of **diakrinw**, used in the following ways in the New Testament:

- (1) as evaluating the difference between things discern, distinguish, differentiate.
Matt. 16:3, “And in the morning, It will be foul weather to day: for the sky is red and lowering. O ye hypocrites, ye can **discern** the face of the sky; but can ye not **discern** the signs of the times?”
- (2) as making a distinction between persons by evaluation make a difference, decide between, pass judgment on. Acts 15:9, “And put no **difference** between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.”
- (3) as a legal technical term for arbitration judge a dispute, settle a difference.
1 Cor. 6:5, “I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? no, not one that shall be able to **judge** between his brethren?”
- (4) in the aorist tense, the middle sense is conveyed with the passive form;
 - (a) as debating an issue dispute, contend, argue, Acts 11:2,
 - (b) as being undecided within oneself doubt, hesitate, waver. James 1:6, “But let him ask in faith, nothing **wavering** (NAS: **doubting**). For he that **wavers** (**doubts**) is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.”

This word **diakrinw** is most often used in the sense of a person’s not understanding something or of doubting something. Furthermore, the response of Peter’s questioners, shown in Acts 11:18, shows that, far from being antagonistic or

confrontational, they readily accepted Peter’s explanation without any further doubt.

Acts 11:18 When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then has God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.

Acts 11:3

11:3 Saying, You went in to uncircumcised men, and did eat with them.

you went in to uncircumcised men,

This is an honest question asked by open-minded men. Several commentators state that this is a contentious issue raised by hard-line Judaizers.

Vincent says that this is an indignant expression.

A. T. Robertson says that the expression is “contemptuous”, and further that “it was the same complaint in principle that the Pharisees had made against Jesus when he ate with publicans and sinners.

Luke 15:1,2, “Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receives sinners, and eats with them.”

Yes it is a *similar* complaint, but *not* in principle. The Pharisees hated Christ and were His mortal enemies; Peter was being questioned by his close friends and colleagues.

The Christian leaders are seeking the truth; and when we read about their immediate acceptance of Peter’s explanation, in verse 18, we see any idea of contention drop away.

You can see true contention in passages like Luke 15:12, where the Pharisees are in bitter contention with the Lord Jesus over issues like these.

NOTE that the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, even though they have heard that the Gentiles had accepted the gospel, do not question Peter’s evangelistic mission to the Gentiles. They don’t ask about Cornelius’s faith in Christ or baptism; rather, they want to know Peter’s reasons for

entering a Gentile home and eating unclean food!
3

READ Romans 3 and 4

and did eat with them.

No one was more strict about Jewish dietary laws than Peter was. The Lord had to go to extraordinary lengths to persuade Peter that what He had cleansed was not to be considered unclean!

The objection of the church members is that Peter entered the home of Gentiles and ate with them. The Jews had always avoided such contact with Gentiles for fear of becoming ceremonially unclean; and they refused to eat with them because they were commanded not to eat anything unclean. They had been compelled to reject social contact with Gentiles for these reasons; in addition, there would have been intense social pressure to conform, from Jews who were not Christians. 4

Acts 11:4

11:4 But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them, saying,

In his report Peter presents three pieces of evidence: (1) the vision from God (Acts 11:5-11); (2) the witness of the Holy Spirit (Acts 11:12-15, 17), and (3) the witness of the Word of Christ (Acts 11:16). Of course, none of these men had seen the vision, but they trusted Peter's report, for they knew that, in his personal life, he had been as orthodox as they were. He was not likely to go to the Gentiles on his own and then invent a story to cover up. 5

rehearsed the matter from the beginning

This phrase in the KJV translation is from the single Greek word ἀρχάμενος, which means, simply, "to begin". It is a participle from the verb ἀρχαίνω which means primarily "to rule" but also

3 Baker, Acts 11

4 Baker, Acts 11

5 Bible Exposition Commentary, Acts 11

means "to begin; to start". The NIV has a simpler and more correct phrase, "Peter began ... and explained everything to them precisely as it had happened." expounded by order.

The perfect middle of ἐκτίθημι "to set forth." Peter gave them an orderly and complete narrative of the events. And a thorough and accurate explanation was certainly needed. This is one of the most important teaching sessions that Peter would have, to instruct these apostles and elders in fundamental Grace doctrines.

"By order" is (καταξη~), "one after another."

Good training is devoted to the content of the instruction, without deviating into side issues, personal anecdotes, or irrelevant stories or comments.

I attended an Air Force class in chemical suit training when I was on a job overseas. The instructor filled the two-hour session with facts, demonstrations, and careful teaching. There were no anecdotes, personal stories, or opinions about politics; only that which was useful to us who were learning how to use the chemical gear.

Preaching (khrussw) is the work of teaching the Word of God without deviating from the text.

Acts 11:5

11:5 I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me:

I was in the city of Joppa praying

It's about 35 miles (Clarke says 12 to 15 leagues) from Caesarea to Joppa, so Cornelius's men would have had to leave early in the morning. They were drawing near the city about noon, which is the **sixth hour**. A Roman soldier would be used to marching 30 miles per day with full equipment; but this soldier had the two civilians with him, who were probably not in as good condition. But even at three miles per hour, they would have had to leave Caesarea at midnight or soon after.

As we know from chapter 10, Peter was on the roof, or housetop, of Simon the tanner's house.

The “housetop” was a typical rooftop of homes in those days, enclosed and probably having small trees or vines to provide shade. Robertson says that a rooftop was a good place for meditation, prayer, and *naps!*⁶

Recall what had happened two days before at Cornelius’s house. **Acts 10:1-8.**

in a trance I saw a vision

“Trance” is *ekstasei*. Acts 10:10 says, “he fell into a trance.” Literally, “an ecstasy came upon him.” (**eigeneto ep’auton ekstasi**~). He was filled with a wonder and an astonishment. Barnes describes it as “a state of mind when the attention is so absorbed in a train of thought, that the external senses are partially or entirely suspended.” This was a state of such mental concentration, daydreaming is an example, that one is not aware of outside things.

A person’s mind is divided into the conscious mind and the subconscious. We go about our daily lives using about 15% of our conscious minds, leaving the other 85% to the subconscious. When we are awake, the conscious mind is more active and noticeable than the subconscious; but when we are very relaxed or daydreaming, the subconscious becomes more active.⁷

Consciousness means awareness. We use the conscious mind to reason between cause and effect. We take in information by the senses: sight, smell; taste; touch; hearing; and we use that information to think and make judgments based on our stored knowledge and experiences.

The subconscious is a file cabinet where all of our past history is stored. When the conscious mind needs some information, it goes to the subconscious to retrieve it.

The **conscious** mind also controls *voluntary* bodily movements; but the **subconscious** controls *involuntary* bodily functions. The subconscious is

⁶ Robertson, Acts 10:9

⁷ Grossman, Dr. Kenneth, *The Conscious and Subconscious Minds*

active when the conscious mind is not functioning, such as during sleep. The fact that we breathe and our hearts beat, without our consciously thinking about it, is proof that the subconscious is at work.

The subconscious also works on “problems” submitted to it by the conscious mind. That’s why we say about an idea, “Let me sleep on it.” And it is well known that while we are asleep, the brain often works out some difficult problems.

Those who study the function of the mind recognize that the brain operates in four general states, determined by the electricity generated by the exchange of chemicals in the neural pathways. The four states are:

- Full Conscious Awareness State
- Deep Relaxation State
- Dream State
- Sleep State

In the state of Deep Relaxation, both the conscious and subconscious minds are functioning, and here memories become more easily accessible. This is the state of mind that a hypnotist uses to make suggestions that register on the subconscious, later to be used by the conscious mind after a person becomes fully aware again.

The “trance” is the Deep Relaxation State. When a person is in a trance, he is not fully active, but he is also not dreaming or sleeping. He is relaxed, and the “volume control” of the conscious mind is turned down.

a certain vessel descend

“Vessel” is *skeuon*. “a vessel; an implement” In the plural, “household utensils; domestic gear; the tackle and armament of vessels”, used specifically of sails and ropes. Also, “a man of quality, a chosen instrument”. “Vessel” was a common Greek metaphor for “body” since Greeks thought of souls living temporarily in bodies.

In Acts 9:15, God tells Ananias that Paul is a “chosen vessel (*skeuon*) unto me...”.

So, Peter is using this word to refer to some sort of container which he sees, which he described as:

a great sheet let down from heaven by four corners

This is an old Greek word for linen cloth. The corners were tied, as if with a rope, so that the full sheet would form into a sort of sack. One commentator thinks that this is like a ship's sail, tied by ropes and billowing in the wind. In any case, Peter saw in his mind's eye the sheet, full of animals, being lowered down to the earth.

and it came even to me

This is new information. In Acts 10:11 he said that the vessel was let down to the earth. Now he adds that "it came even to me."

Acts 11:6

11:6 Upon which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.

Upon which when I had fastened mine eyes

This is the verb **ajenizw**, "to look intently; to gaze earnestly; to stare.

Luke 4:14-20, "And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee ... And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all. ... And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him."

Acts 3:4, "And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us."

Acts 3:12, "And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?"

Peter was very intently looking at the objects in the vision that he saw.

I considered, and saw,

Considered is **katenoun** the imp. act of **katanoew**, "to put the mind down on; to ponder; to observe well".

fourfooted beasts of the earth

This is **tetrapodo~**, Latin *quadrupedia*. Quadrupeds; four-footed animals. Cattle, horses, camels, elephants, etc. Some clean, some unclean.

wild beasts

What Peter saw was a complete representative selection of clean and unclean animals.

creeping things

Snakes, from the Greek, **ejpeto~** [Engl. herpetology]

fowls of the air

or, birds.

Literally, "all the four-footed beasts," *not* "of many kinds." All varieties of animals are included, the clean and the unclean, all reptiles, and all fowls. Fish are omitted here, although in the Old Testament, there were fish which were both clean and unclean. (Lev. 11:9; Deut. 14:9)

Acts 11:7

11:7 And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay and eat.

I heard a voice saying unto me

Peter heard this voice while he was in the trance. he heard it in his mind; if someone else had been present, they would have heard nothing.

Contrast this with Acts 9:7, "And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, *hearing a voice*, but seeing no man."

Acts 22:17,18, "And it came to pass, that, when I had come again to Jerusalem, while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance;

And saw him saying to me, Make haste, and get you quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive your testimony concerning me.

Arise, Peter, slay and eat.

The word "kill" is **quw** which means "to offer in sacrifice; to offer as part of a meal to the gods."

Hence, "Get up, Peter, sacrifice some of these animals and eat."

The reason that the Law required clean animals for the sacrifice was because of the typology; the animals represented Christ.

After animals were killed for the burnt offering, and the offering made to God, the meat was made available to the whole priesthood for their meals. Here, God is commanding Peter to offer any of these animals in sacrifice, even the unclean ones, then to eat.

THE MATERIAL OF THE SIN OFFERING

The animal to be offered was determined by the nature of the offense and by the position, or rank, of the one making the offering.

A young bullock was offered for a sin of the whole congregation (Lev. 4:13), for a sin of the high priest (Lev. 4:3), for the high priest on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:3), and for the consecration of priests and Levites to their offices (Exo. 29:10,14,35; Num. 8:8).

A he-goat was offered on new moon and annual festivals (Num. 28:15,22,30; 29:5,11,16,19), at the dedication of the tabernacle (and Temple) (Num. 7:16,22; Ezra 6:17, w/8:35), and for the sin of a prince (Lev. 4:23).

A she-goat was offered for a sin by one of the common people (Lev. 4:28,32; 5:6).

A she-lamb of a year old was offered for the cleansing of a leper (Lev. 14:10,19) and when a Nazarite was released from his vow (Num. 6:14).

A pigeon or turtledove was used for purifying a woman after childbirth (Lev. 12:6), for a man or woman who had protracted issues of blood (Lev. 15:14,29), and for a Nazarite who had been defiled by contact with a dead body (Num. 6:10). A bird was also used as a substitute for a lamb in the case of poverty, for an ordinary offense (Lev. 5:7).

TYOLOGY OF THE SIN OFFERING

The sin offering presents Christ atoning for the guilt of sin (Heb. 13:11,12). It shows Christ as actually burdened with the believer's sin, standing in the sinner's place as his substitute. This offering tells of the Lord's death as presented in Isaiah 53, Psalm 22, and 1 Peter

2:24. It carefully guards the holiness of Him who "was made sin for us."

This vision is appearing in Peter's mind. There is no idea here of actual animals appearing or that Peter will actually kill an animal and cook the flesh. This is a symbolic representation which has a direct application, that the Gentiles, whom the Jews consider to be unclean, are an equal part of God's plan for Christianity.

Acts 11:8

11:8 But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean has at any time entered into my mouth.

Not so, Lord.

In the Old Testament God had made a distinction between clean and unclean animals. See **Leviticus 11:2-27; Deuteronomy 14:3-20**. Peter pled that he had never violated these laws, and that he could not now violate it, as it was a law of God.

Peter had been reared from childhood to distinguish between clean and unclean food, as well as to make all of the other distinctions between that which is clean and unclean. Peter regards this "proposal" of God's as against all his upbringing and training; he would have been in great spiritual turmoil here.

for nothing common or unclean has at any time entered my mouth.

This would include unclean fish, those that did not have both fins and scales, e.g. eels, shellfish. As a fisherman, Peter would have been well aware of whether a particular species of fish was unclean.

Clean insects were those which had wings and four legs, with two hind legs for jumping. Grasshoppers were OK, but not cockroaches!

This passage shows that Peter, an "ignorant and unlearned" fisherman, was nevertheless just as knowledgeable and strict on this point as any Pharisee.

Acts 4:13, "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus."

“unlearned” (**agrammatoi**) = literally, “unlettered,” with specific reference here to the Rabbinic culture, which Peter had never been involved with. Peter and John had no credentials to teach; they hadn’t studied in either of the great schools of Hillel and Schammai.

“ignorant” (**idiotai**). “Ignorant” is a poor choice for this translation. This Greek word referred to a person who was in a “private” situation, rather than someone in public office or community affairs. The word “layman” would be appropriate. But here, the Sanhedrin would consider themselves superior, so the meaning of “common” or “plebeian” would occur to them, since they regarded the men as ill-informed.

Acts 11:9

11:9 But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God has cleansed, that call not you common.

the voice answered me again from heaven

The voice of the Lord; or the voice of some heavenly messenger, spoke again in response to Peter.

what God has cleansed, that call not you common.

The work of Jesus Christ on the Cross put an end to all of the ceremonial Law, and in particular, here, to the distinctions in food.

Matt. 15:10-12, “And he called the multitude, and said unto them, Hear, and understand:

“Not that which goeth into the mouth defiles a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defiles a man.

“Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying?”

Rom. 14:14, “I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean.”

Here was Paul, a Pharisee of the Pharisees, stating that which was far from obvious to a Jew, that nothing is unclean of itself. Paul must have had just as much trouble as Peter had in adjusting himself to the new dispensation of Grace. Romans 14 shows clearly that there was still a lot of teaching to be done on these questions of Jewish legality.

Acts 11:10

11:10 And this was done three times: and all were drawn up again into heaven.

That is, the voice from heaven repeated the command three times.

After God had spoken three times, the vision ended by the vessel being pulled back into heaven.

Acts 11:11,12

11:11, 12 And, behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Caesarea unto me. And the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man's house:

These were the three men who were sent by Cornelius (Acts 10:17-24). Their appearance just as Peter’s vision ended served to explain the whole thing to Peter, at least up to a point; he would have a full picture once he shows up at Cornelius’ house and sees all the Gentiles gathered together to hear the preaching. Also, Peter has the direct order from the Holy Spirit to go with these men.

See notes on Acts 10:17-24.

Acts 11:13

11:13 And he showed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter;

The word **angello**~ means “messenger”.

In Acts 10:30, Cornelius referred to the messenger as “a man.” Cornelius may not have recognized this person as an angel, but at least he thought of him as an extraordinary person, as one sent from God, so he obeyed the message.

Acts 11:14

11:14 Who shall tell you words, whereby you and all your house shall be saved.

The angelic messenger promised that Peter would bring the gospel message to Cornelius. The term “house” or “household” includes all members of Cornelius’ family, his servants, and even his soldiers.

Acts 16:31, “And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household.” (the Philippian jailer).

Acts 11:15

11:15 And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them, as on us at the beginning.

In his report, Peter does not repeat the message that he spoke at Cornelius’ house; he reports what God did, not what he said. We know that Peter had preached for a while before the Gentiles began to speak in tongues. The words “as I began to speak” mean “during my opening remarks.” Cornelius invited Peter to stay with him in Caesarea for “certain days” (Acts 10:48), and the time obviously would have been spent in extensive teaching.

the Holy Spirit fell on them, as on us at the beginning

The Holy Spirit first fell on believers on the day of Pentecost. The outpouring on that day was a major event in the history of the church. Now Peter explains that the Gentiles also have received the same salvation and the same gift. Cornelius and his family exhibited the same spiritual gift, that of speaking of tongues, that the Christians had received on the Day of Pentecost.

The Christian church now “officially” consists of Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles.⁸

Acts 11:16

11:16 Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed

baptized with water; but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.

Acts 1:4,5, And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, said he, you have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days hence.

When Cornelius’s household accepted Christ by believing the Gospel message, among the things they experienced were there:

1. They were placed into union with Christ by means of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit;
2. They were indwelt by the Holy Spirit;
3. They were filled with the Holy Spirit;
4. They were given spiritual gifts;
5. At least some of them, perhaps all of them, had the spiritual gift of speaking in tongues, which they exercised at this time.

The **Baptism of the Holy Spirit** is that particular work of the Holy Spirit that takes the new believer and places him in union with Jesus Christ.

- 1 The Baptism of the Holy Spirit did not occur in Old Testament times or during the life of Christ. It occurred for the first time on the day of Pentecost.
- 2 It was prophesied by John the Baptist **Matt. 3:11**, “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance; but he that comes after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire...”
- 3 The mechanics of the baptism are described in: **1 Cor. 12:13**, “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.”
- 4 The Baptism of the Holy Spirit unifies all believers, **Eph. 4:5**, “One Lord, one faith, one baptism” While people are diverse in race, culture, personality, geography.

⁸ Baker, Acts 11:15

Gal. 3:26-28, “For you are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit is the great emancipator: of slaves, of women, and especially of those bound up in religion.

This is a key doctrine. It supports many other concepts.

It is the Baptism of the Holy Spirit that makes a person a new creature.

2 Cor. 5:17, “If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature.”

Being a new creature is not a product of how you have changed your life or cleaned up your act. You are a new creature the moment you are saved, before you even have a chance to turn over a new leaf.

Life changes are based on consistency in walking in fellowship, being occupied with Christ, and by the ministry of the Holy Spirit over time, as He teaches and edifies.

Acts 11:17

11:17 Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?

the like gift

That is, “the equal gift”, referring to spiritual gifts, in this case, the gift of speaking in tongues. The Gentiles spoke in tongues, just like the apostles had done on the Day of Pentecost. Both classes, Jews and Gentiles, trusted in Christ, and both received the Holy Spirit.

[Pastor Bolender has an excellent series of lessons on spiritual gifts and the gift of tongues. See his series on 1 Corinthians.]

Acts 10:34, “Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:”

what was I, that I could withstand God

Peter’s rhetorical question is really two questions, “Who was I?” and “Was I able to hinder God?” His statement of the facts made for an unanswerable defense. Yet later in his career, Peter will waver on this issue, equivocating before the emissaries from Jerusalem, on this very point of eating with Gentiles. (Gal. 2:11).⁹

Acts 11:18

11:18 When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then has God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.

they held their peace - **h̄sucasan**, aor. act. ind. of **h̄sucaw**, “to keep quiet; to be still”.

Peter’s report had been fascinating to the apostles and others who were listening. This phrase means that they considered that their question about Peter’s behavior had been answered satisfactorily.

glorified God – **ejloxazon**, aor. act. ind. of **doxazw**, a verb which has a variety of uses, meaning generally “to imagine; to magnify; to extol; to glorify”.

repentance unto life

Or, from the NAS, **repentance that leads to life**.

Now, this is a curious phrase in some respects. Why are they saying that repentance leads to life, when we are sure that eternal life is based on “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.” Consider the Philippian jailer’s salvation:

Acts 16:31,32, “And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, **Believe (pisteuw)** on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.

But then, on the Day of Pentecost, Peter told the people:

Acts 2:38, “Then Peter said unto them, Repent (**metanoew**), and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the

⁹ Robertson, Acts 11:17

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remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”

“believe” is **pisteuw**, “to believe”.

“repentance” is **metanoia**, “a change of mind or heart; repentance”.

So the question is, how do we reconcile these two words in deciding exactly how it is that a person gets saved?

The problem is with the word “repentance” in this verse. The problem occurs because the English word “repent” carries the meaning of “feeling sorrow or regret” or “turning away” from something. And from these English definitions, many people have taught that a person must be sincerely sorry about sin and turn away from it, as a necessary condition for salvation.

But the Greek word here, **metanoia**, from which the word “repentance” is translated, means “a change of mind,” and it has no connotation either of feeling regretful for, or of turning away from, sin. I hope that the following discussion, of both the English and Greek words in this context, will help explain what is intended.

First, let’s examine the English word. “Repent” is from the Latin, *re + poenitere*, meaning “to regret; to be sorry”. The Oxford English Dictionary has the following meanings:

1. To affect oneself with contrition as regret for something done or for something inherently wrong, some fault, misconduct, sin, or other offence.
2. To feel contrition, compunction, sorrow, or regret.
3. To change one’s mind with regard to past action or conduct through dissatisfaction with it or its results.

You can see that a person’s opinion of what is required for salvation is colored by which of the above definitions is chosen. That is, if you choose #1 or #2 you might conclude that, in order to properly repent, you must feel great sorrow or regret for your sins.

Now, regret can range from a mild regret to a life-threatening sorrow. A mild regret says, “Oh, I see I’ve been wrong; I’ll do it the other way.” A

severe regret is a raging sorrow which can destroy one emotionally and physically, as from some unintentional action that harms a loved one.

So, a person may feel great regret about sin: the offense to God, the effect on others, etc. Or, a person may not know enough about sin, or its consequences, to have much regret at all. For many people, the first they hear about sin is in an evangelistic message or Bible class.

Regret over past sins actually grows as one is edified, as a person gains divine viewpoint and sees real issues in life. If a believer doesn’t learn about forgiveness, confession, and restoration to fellowship, he might build up a tremendous guilt complex about his past. This is why it’s such a blessing to know that past sins have been forgiven. “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.”

But *making regret a necessary part of salvation raises a dilemma* – if “repentance” is “feeling sorry for sin,” then how sorry do you have to feel? Mild sorrow or raging sorrow? And how do you demonstrate this sorrow to God? These thoughts lead people into such extremes as asceticism and self-punishment of one kind or another – great attempts to impress God, and other people, with the extent of one’s contrition.

Another question arises from this, “Will I have to wait until the end of my life, or until I face God, to know whether my sorrow has been enough?” And some religions teach just that, that you won’t really know until you reach eternity just what your status is.

And, “What about my lack of knowledge of sins? How many sins are there that I don’t even know about? How much sorrow must I have about each type and variety? Must I feel as sorry for gossip as I would for murder?”

The question here, of course, is “works.” Can repentance be misconstrued to support a “works” doctrine? Yes it can, if feeling sorry is made a necessary constituent of salvation. Just as in all forms of legalism, there is great potential here for bullying by clergy and “informed” laymen.

To resolve these vocabulary problems, the Greek word must be studied.

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The Greek for “repent” is METANOEW, which means “to change the mind; to rethink something.” *There is no emotion or feeling involved in this activity.* Therefore, if we are going to use the English word “repent” to translate METANOEW, we must be certain that Definition #3 (above) is meant!

METANOEW, as an active verb, needs to have an object in context. One must change one’s mind about something. You might change your mind because of an honest mistake. You bought a Ferrari and now you can’t pay for it. Or, you may receive some education that changes your thinking about many things.

If you have accepted Christ as Savior, at some point you changed your thinking about your sin, your relationship to God, and about the work of Christ for salvation.

If you have studied the Bible as a Christian, the Word of God has led you to change your mind about many things.

Eph. 4:22-24, “That you put off concerning the former manner of life the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,
 “And be renewed in the spirit of your mind;
 “And that you put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.”

Sin is too pervasive; there are too many sins. Mental attitude sins – sins of the tongue – open and public sins. You can’t turn away from all your sins, even temporarily.

You can see what a vicious circle the legalist is in, the one who thinks you can lose your salvation. If it were possible to lose salvation, assuming you were successful in earning it in the first place, you could never keep salvation.

Let’s compare this verse and Acts 16:31, in which the Philippian jailer is told simply to “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.”

We can see that “believe” (PISTEUW) and “repent” (METANOEW) are synonymous in their application.

Both require focusing one’s attention on Christ.

Both require positive volition to the Gospel.

Both require acceptance of divine viewpoint regarding Christ and His work on the Cross.

Both mean that you have information that you did not have before and that you accept a point of view.

Both mental attitudes are non-meritorious, that is, neither involves any sort of works.

The Jew, however, is going to have a more wrenching experience as he turns from his religion to Christ. “Repentance” means that, however much he loves his religion and follows his religious practices, he no longer trusts in the works of his religion to save him. He trusts Christ.

The Philippian jailer has no such hold over his mind. He accepts Christ readily, with no religious reservations. He is simply a man in trouble grasping at a straw which turns out to be a lifeboat.

Acts 11:19

11:19 Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen traveled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to the Jews only.

We have seen that the persecution in which Stephen was killed resulted in a general dispersion of the Christians.

Acts 8:1, And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.

The persecution was, at first, against the church in Jerusalem, which was no sooner planted than it was persecuted. Christ often taught that tribulation and persecution would arise because of the Word. And the Lord had particularly foretold that Jerusalem would soon be made dangerous for his followers, for that city had been famous for killing the prophets and stoning those that were sent to it, Matthew 23:37.

In this persecution many were put to death, for Paul states that at this time he “persecuted this way [Christianity] unto the death,” (Acts 21:4): and

that when they were put to death he gave his voice against them (Acts 26:10).”¹⁰

According to some accounts, though they cannot be depended on, two thousand persons suffered at this time: and if this was the case, it would certainly qualify as a great persecution.

scattered abroad – aor. pass. participle of **diaspeirw** “to scatter; to disperse” The *passive* voice indicates that the people did not scatter themselves, but that they were scattered by other people, namely, by those who were persecuting them.

Those who were scattered at this time were, mainly, the preachers of the word; those who brought themselves under the notice of the Jewish hierarchy for their outspoken witnessing.

We know that not all believers were being scattered at this time, although certainly over the next few years, believers of all types were “sown” throughout the Middle East.

GILL: “Not all the members of the church [were scattered], nor perhaps any of the private ones; for we afterwards read of devout men that carried Stephen to his grave; and of the church being made havoc of by Saul; and of men and women being haled out of their houses, and committed to prison by him; but all the preachers of the word [were scattered], except the apostles; for they that were scattered went about preaching the word, (Acts 8:4, 11:19) Among these were Philip, who went to Samaria; Ananias, who was at Damascus; and others that went as far as Phenice, Cyprus, and Antioch.”¹¹

Wherever they went they spoke to their Jewish brethren of their faith that the promises had been fulfilled in the life and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This dispersion and preaching of the Gospel extended even to the island of Cyprus, and along the Phoenician coast as far as Antioch. For some time the glad tidings were made known only to the scattered children of Israel. But at length some of

¹⁰ Henry, Matthew, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*

¹¹ Gill, John, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*.

the Hellenistic Jews, natives of Cyprus and Cyrene, spoke to the Greeks themselves at Antioch, and the divine Spirit gave such power to the Word that a vast number “believed and turned to the Lord.”¹²

Phenice¹³

Phoenicia was an ancient civilization centered in the north of ancient Canaan, lying mainly along the coast of modern day Lebanon, Syria and northern Israel. Phoenician civilization was an enterprising maritime trading culture that spread across the Mediterranean during the first millennium BC, between the period of 1200 BC to 900 BC.

Though ancient boundaries of such city-centered cultures fluctuated, the city of Tyre seems to have been the southernmost. Tyre is the most thoroughly excavated city of the Phoenician homeland. The Phoenicians often traded by means of a galley, a man-powered sailing vessel. They were the first civilization to create the *bireme*.

Cyrus the Great conquered Phoenicia in 539 BC. Phoenicia was divided into four vassal kingdoms by the Persians: Sidon, Tyre, Arwad, and Byblos; and prospered, furnishing fleets for the Persian kings.

Phoenician influence declined after this. Some of the Phoenician population migrated to Carthage and other colonies following the Persian conquest, as it is roughly then that we first hear of Carthage as a powerful maritime entity.

In 350 or 345 BC a rebellion in Sidon led by Tennes was crushed by Artaxerxes III.

Alexander the Great took Tyre in 332 BC following the Siege of Tyre. Alexander was exceptionally harsh to Tyre, executing 2000 of the leading citizens, but he maintained the king in power. He gained control of the other cities peacefully. The rise of Hellenistic Greece gradually ousted the remnants of Phoenicia's former dominance over the Eastern Mediterranean

¹² Conybeare and Howson, chapter 4

¹³ Wikipedia

trade routes, and Phoenician culture disappeared entirely in the motherland (northern Canaan). However, its North African offspring, Carthage, continued to flourish, mining iron and precious metals from Iberia, and using its considerable naval power and mercenary armies to protect its commercial interests, until it was finally destroyed by Rome in 146 BC at the end of the Punic (Phoenician) Wars.

As for the Phoenician homeland, following Alexander it was controlled by a succession of Hellenistic rulers: Laomedon (323 BC), Ptolemy I (320), Antigonus II (315), Demetrius (301), and Seleucus (296). Between 286 and 197 BC, Phoenicia (except for Aradus) fell to the Ptolemies of Egypt, who installed the high priests of Astarte as vassal rulers in Sidon (Eshmunazar I, Tabnit, Eshmunazar II). In 197 BC, Phoenicia along with Syria reverted to the Seleucids, and the region became increasingly Hellenized, although Tyre actually became autonomous in 126 BC, followed by Sidon in 111. Syria, including Phoenicia, were seized by king Tigranes the Great from 82 until 69 BC when he was defeated by Lucullus, and in 65 BC Pompey finally incorporated it as part of the Roman province of Syria.

Cyprus

Cyprus is an island off the coast of Asia Minor, in the Mediterranean Sea, lying between the shores of Syria and Cilicia. It had Syria on the east, Pamphylia on the west, Phoenicia on the south, and Cilicia on the north (according to the historian Ptolemy).

According to Pliny ¹⁴, it lay to the east and west of Cilicia, and was opposite Syria, and had been the seat of nine kingdoms; its circumference was three hundred and seventy miles, and had been called by various names; as Acamantis, Cerastis, Aspella, Amathusia, Macaria, Crypton, and Colinia. On Cyprus were fifteen towns or cities, which were **Paphos**, Palsepaphos, Curias, Citium, Corineum, **Salamis**, Amethus, Lapethos, Solce, Tamaseus, Epidarum, Chytri, Arsinoe, Carpasium, and Golgi. According to the same writer, it was

¹⁴ Pliny, Natural History, 50:5

split off from Syria by an earthquake; and that part of it which lay to the east from Syria is said to be less than a hundred miles distant from it.

Cyprus' chief cities were Salamis and Paphos mentioned in:

Acts 13:5,6, "And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to their minister.

"And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Barjesus:"

Antioch

Antioch on the Orontes (Greek: **Αντιόχεια** η επί Ορόντου or Αντιόχεια η Μεγάλη); {Latin: **Antiochia** ad Orontem; or Antiochia dei Siri, Great Antioch or Syrian Antioch) was an ancient city on the eastern side (left bank) of the Orontes River, located on the site of the modern city of **Antakya**, Turkey.

Antioch was founded near the end of the 4th century BC by Seleucus I Nicator, one of Alexander the Great's generals, Antioch was destined to rival Alexandria as the chief city of the nearer East and to be the cradle of gentile Christianity. It was one of the four cities of the Syrian tetrapolis.

I will reserve the main discussion of the history of Antioch, its place in the Roman Empire, Antioch as the location of the first Gentile church, and other interesting things, until the notes on Acts 11:26.

preaching the word to the Jews only

It was the preaching Christians who journeyed to these places, and many others, evangelizing primarily the Jews.

These disciples probably did not know anything about the events at Cornelius's house; their dispersion from Jerusalem occurred before that time. It took several decades, actually, for the transition to the point where both Jews and Gentiles were being evangelized.

Acts 11:20

11:20 And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they came to Antioch, spoke unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus.

Cyprus

Some of the preachers were Jews who were born in Cyprus (not immigrants). Barnabas was a Cypriot Jew, although he was not one of those who came from Cyprus to Antioch.

Cyrene

The Bible speaks of Cyrenians in several places. Simon of Cyrene carried the Cross for the Lord Jesus on the way to His crucifixion.

Mark 15:21, "And they compel one **Simon** a Cyrenian, who passed by, coming out of the country, the father of **Alexander** and **Rufus**, to bear his cross."

Then there were people from Cyrene who were present on the Day of Pentecost to hear the disciples speaking in their own language.

Libya – the country between Egypt and (formerly) Carthage. Scene of some of the desert battles of WWII. Cyrene is a Greek colony founded in Libya. The Greeks of Cyrene spoke a type of Greek. The rest of the Libyans spoke a North African language, possibly having Semitic roots.

Grecians

NAS says "Greeks"; NIV says "Greeks"; KJV says "Grecians".

A question here is, who were the people who were being evangelized here; were they Jews or Gentiles? The answer: they were preaching to Gentile Greek people.

The difference among English versions arises from the fact that some of the top-level Greek manuscripts of Acts use the word **eIlhnisthv**, and others use **eIlhma~**. The KJV was translated from a manuscript that has **eIlhnisthv**. The NAS and NIV from **eIlhma~**.

Greeks (eIlhma~) were non-Jews, Gentile people who were part of the Greek civilization.

Grecians (eIlhnisthv) were Jews who were born and raised in a Greek culture, spoke Greek, and sometimes did not even speak Hebrew (or Aramaic). **eIlhnisthv** means, in general, "Greek speaking", so not necessarily ethnic Greek, but of the Greek society and culture. In Acts, though, the Grecians (**eIlhnisthv**) were, in particular, Jews who came from the Greek culture.

Thus, for example, the problem that cropped up in Acts 6.

There was a continual evangelistic effort going on, even in those early days, and this was bringing about a considerable growth in numbers in the community of Christians in Jerusalem. Because of the growing persecution, more and more people were experiencing privation. When a Jew became a Christian, he would be cut off from any help he might receive from the Jewish community. Widows, for example, who would have received financial help from the Temple funds set aside for that purpose, would have been cut off as soon as it was found out that they were Christians.

When money is involved, you can expect that there will be controversy, as some people's expectations are not met. It is very difficult, in any case, to make a fair and equitable distribution. Mistakes will be made; deserving recipients will be overlooked, and sometimes the undeserving will receive funds.

Here, there is an added problem. The same lines of division exist among the Christians that characterized their relationships as Jews, namely, that some of them were **Hebrews**, or Aramean Jews (speaking Aramaic), and others were Jews who came from a Greek culture, and who spoke Greek, **Hellenists**. As these two types of people were brought together into local Christian congregations, the great differences between them would cause considerable problems, at first, until the majority could absorb the great Grace doctrines of the Christian life and begin to move away from their former lives, under the teaching and edifying ministry of the Holy Spirit.

“HEBREWS”

Any man was a Jew [**ijudiao~**] who could trace his descent from Jacob. The word “Jew” is a racial identity.

A **Hebrew** was a Jew who spoke Hebrew and retained Hebrew customs, following the ancient religion closely.

The Hebrews whose families had come from Aram were called **Arameans**. This word refers to Aram, or Padan-Aram, the district of Mesopotamia surrounding the city of Haran, and the territory included the city of Damascus. Aram was the 5th son of Shem, Noah’s oldest son; Haran was the elder son of Terah and Abraham’s brother; he was the father of Lot. The Jews from these areas spoke Aramaic (Assyrian), as did the Palestinian Jews of the time of Christ. Parts of the Old Testament were written in Aramaic, and Jesus spoke Aramaic.

Note: King Ahab fought against Ben-Hadad, king of Aram, whose capital was Damascus.

The distinction between a Hebrew and a Hellenists was a distinction within the Jewish nation, not between the Jews and other nations. Paul calls himself a “Hebrew of Hebrews,” that is, a Hebrew and of Hebrew parents, speaking Hebrew and following Hebrew customs.

In this verse, both Hebrews and Hellenists are Christian believers, but there is still the line of cleavage between the two groups, which had the potential for conflict.

A **Hellenizer** was a Jew who followed Greek philosophy and culture instead of the Jewish religion and practices.

Acts 11:21

Acts 11:21, And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord.

Uncleanness in the Levitical System

In the Old Testament Times, the Law of Moses declared the following foods to be unclean and not to be eaten. If any of these were touched, the individual had to participate in some form of ceremonial cleansing.

- Animals strangled, or dead by natural causes

- Animals killed by other animals or birds of prey
- Any animal that did not both chew the cud and divide the hoof
- Animals classified as creeping things
- Twenty or so types of birds mentioned in Lev. 11 and Deut. 14
- Any water fish or animal that did not have both fins and scales
- Any insect that had wings that did not also have four legs, with the two back legs for leaping
- Anything offered in sacrifice to idols
- All blood. (Any container which had had blood in it had to be purified.)
- Any flesh cut from a live animal; and any discernible fat

The idea was that any animal was unclean if it bore the image of sin, or death, or of corruption, such as the larger land animals, carnivorous animals or birds, which lie in wait for living things and devour them ("the devil as a roaring lion..."). Also marsh birds and carrion birds which live on worms, carrion, and other impurities; all serpent like fishes and slimy shellfish, and small creeping things, except some kinds of locusts. "...because, partly, they recall the old serpent, partly they seek their food in all sorts of impurities, partly they crawl in the dust and represent corruption in the slimy character of their bodies" (Keil, *Biblical Archaeology*, II, 117 ff).

Anything dead was a source of ceremonial (religious) impurity.

- The dead body of a human being, no matter how he had died, was unclean, as well as the building in which he lay, his clothing, any person who lived in the building or entered it. It was defiling to touch a body or a dead man's bones or a grave. A person defiled in this manner also defiled everything he touched, or any other people he touched, until the evening of the day he was defiled.
- Any animal carcass, clean or unclean, defiled anyone who touched it, until the evening, so

that he was required to bathe himself and wash his clothes before being clean again.

- Thus it was equally unclean to touch a dead animal of any kind as it was to touch an unclean animal which was alive.
- There were eight kinds of small animals which spread their defiling influence to inanimate objects. These were weasels, mice, and six species of lizard. If any part of their carcass fell onto a cooking vessel, it was rendered unclean. If water had been contaminated by a dead animal, food which had been prepared in it was contaminated and could not be eaten. If such water had got some seed wet, the food which grew from that seed was polluted.

There were several types of defilement from bodily conditions and diseases

- Leprosy rendered the person unclean until he was completely healed. The leper was required to tear his clothes, to bare his head, to put a covering on his upper lip, and to cry "Unclean" to everyone he met. He also had to isolate himself by living outside the camp or city. Houses infected with leprosy were examined by the priest, who, before entering, had all the contents of the house removed in order to prevent everything within from becoming unclean. If symptoms of leprosy were discovered, the house was closed for seven days, after which it was reexamined. If leprosy was still found, the affected stones were removed, along with scrapings of all walls, and the house was carefully replastered. Seven days after this, if there was still infection, the house was torn down and everything was taken outside the city to the place of unclean things.

Infected clothing was examined after seven days, and if still infected, it was burned. The purification rites for healed lepers is described in Lev. 8 and Lev. 14.

- Any bodily discharge was unclean, and persons affected were considered unclean for a period lasting from seven to sixty-six days, depending upon the cause. Then they had to go through purification rites of cleansing. An unclean

person was barred from touching anything holy or coming into the sanctuary.