Harvester Christian Church

Life Groups | **PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY**

ACTS | Powered by the Spirit | Spirit Powered Inclusion

**WEEK 8 – ACTS 10:1-11:18**

Jesus was a Jew. His first followers were all Jews. Christianity was originally considered a sect of Judaism. We saw in the opening verses of Acts that the disciples expected that Christ, having risen from the dead, would then make the restoration of Israel His top priority (Acts 1:6). But they were in for a big surprise! The theme for this week’s study is **Spirit Powered Inclusion.** We will see that, at this point in the book of Acts, God is making it clear that salvation through faith in Christ is available to everyone. We will read this week about the gospel being offered to, and accepted by, Gentiles (non-Jews). We have seen hints of this already. Philip baptized an Ethiopian, who was likely a God-fearing Gentile (Acts 8:26-40). Last week we read about Saul/Paul being God’s chosen instrument to take the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15). Now we are going to read about God sending the Apostle Peter to a man named Cornelius. **Pray for wisdom and understanding and then read Acts 10:1-11:18.**

**Cornelius** was a centurion (a Roman Army officer) in Caesarea. What are we told about the kind of man he was from a religious perspective? (10:2)

* A “God-fearing” Gentile was one who supported the synagogue and prayed to the God of Israel but did not keep the other Jewish laws and customs (i.e., circumcision, dietary laws, etc.). Go to **BibleGateway.com** and enter the words **“God fearing”** in the search box at the top of the page and make note of how often that term is used in the book of Acts.
* The angel had two basic messages for Cornelius. What were they? (10:4-6)

The **Apostle Peter** was staying in Joppa when God gave him a vision. (10:9-16)

* + Describe the basics of the vision.
  + To understand Peter’s refusal to eat certain animals, read Leviticus 11.
  + What words were spoken to Peter to change his mind about animals, and eventually people, who had been considered “unclean?” (10:15)

**A Divine Appointment (10:24-48)**

God had prepared both Cornelius and Peter for a ground-breaking conversation in Caesarea.

* When Peter arrived at Cornelius’ home, who else was there? (10:24-27)
* What traditional social norm was Peter violating by this visit? (10:28)
* When Peter begins to speak, what central truth does he reveal about God? (10:34-35)
* What did Peter say is available to ***everyone*** who believes in Jesus? (10:43)
* What unusual thing did God do next to prove to Peter and his Jewish companions that He accepted these Gentiles as His own? (10:44-46)
* What next step did Peter order for these new believers? (10:47-48)

It took Jewish Christ-followers a while to warm up to the fact that a Gentile could be a Christian without first becoming a Jew. Notice the immediate criticism Peter received for his actions in Caesarea (11:1-2). After Peter shared the whole story of what had taken place, they (the apostles and brothers) rejoiced that “…God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life” (11:18). But even so, if we fast-forward a few chapters, we see this same debate raging on in Acts 15.

* What important summary statement did James make in regard to the treatment of Gentiles who were turning to the Lord? (15:19)

**Application**

The problem facing the early church at this point in the book of Acts was that God was more accepting of “outsiders” than they were. God wanted them to see that anyone who trusted in Jesus could find forgiveness and hope in Him, regardless of their race or background.

Take some time this week to examine your own heart in regard to those you tend to see as outsiders. What prejudices might you be holding on to? In what ways might you be making it more difficult than it should be for people to come to the Lord?

Make time this week to pray with gratitude for God’s inclusiveness, realizing that those of us who are not of Jewish heritage would have been seen as outsiders at one point in the history of the church. Thank God for welcoming you into His family and eternal kingdom.

Finally, commit yourself to being a welcoming presence for those who come seeking a church home. Show the same warmth and acceptance to them that God has shown to you.

**Discussion Questions**

Was there anything in this week’s reading you wanted to discuss tonight?

At one point the early church was making it too difficult for Gentiles to come to the Lord. Do you think we make it more difficult than it needs to be for people to come to the Lord today? If so, how so?

Describe a time when you felt like an outsider. What was that experience like for you?

In regard to the church today, do you feel more like an insider or an outsider and why?

What are some ways in which insiders may unintentionally communicate to outsiders they aren’t welcome? How do we make sure that doesn’t happen?