



## **The Acts of the Holy Spirit 13 –The Jews unite with the Gentiles - Acts Chapter 11**

### **Acts 11:1-18.**

The Jews had always believed that they alone were the people that God had chosen. They saw themselves as the superior race – the ones who were to inherit all that God had promised them; the people that through the centuries, despite their ups and downs had, by and large, maintained God's laws. And now, as a natural extension of this 'faithfulness', God had given them the right to eternal life through Jesus. Some of them (beginning with the disciples whom Jesus called at the start of His ministry) had begun to understand the meaning of salvation, the benefits

of having the risen Jesus as their Lord and Saviour, and that Jesus had clearly stated that He had come to the lost House of Israel. **Matthew 15:21-28**

Now they began suddenly to appreciate that things were not quite what they had believed. In fact things were much bigger and wider than they had believed, and what they had thought was for Jews only, God had begun to show them was for Gentiles too – in fact the entire world was included in God's provision.

This was an incredible concept, but what was more shocking to their already startled minds was that they, the disciples of Jesus, were those who had been entrusted with telling everyone about this provision. Further, they began to understand that there was no 'Plan B'. If they did not tell the rest of the world, then the rest of the world would not hear. No provision had been made other than that one person lovingly and gently told his family, friends and acquaintances. Jesus had told them this earlier, but they had forgotten, or misunderstood what He was saying, **Matthew 28:18-20**.

Perhaps they thought that as there were Jews in every nation that they were to go and make converts of them, but Jesus had not said that. What He had said was:

But when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power to testify about me with great effect, to the people in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth, about my death and resurrection." **Acts 1:8**

They had experienced Jews (their friends and relatives) becoming Christians in Jerusalem. They had seen them giving their lives to Jesus in Judea and Samaria, and now they were seeing Gentiles being saved in Caesarea (**Acts 10:34-48**). There had been a radical change in their vision as they obeyed, sometimes reluctantly, the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Not one person was to be excluded from the offer of salvation. It was to be open to everyone, and this was revolutionary to the embryonic church. Some questioned, (**Acts 10:9-33**), others disbelieved, **Acts 11:1-3**. What Peter, through the Holy Spirit had to say to them caused them to be glad and to praise God. He expressed very clearly all that had happened to him, his dream trance, all God had spoken to him and the trouble God had gone to preparing the Gentiles for his coming. He explained how the Holy Spirit had fallen on them just as it had fallen on the apostles in the beginning. His explanation answered all their objections and they immediately started praising God. See how their hearts were all for God and His desires rather than their own prejudices? What a challenge, **Acts 11:15-18**.

How does that apply to us? If we are not very careful, we too can become doubting, skeptical and protective over who can and cannot, or who will and will not, become Christians, Before long, we have built ourselves an exclusive and protected world into which we retreat thinking that we are the only ones to whom God has spoken, whom He is blessing. If we are like that we need to be honest with Him, repent, and then be prepared for God to do some amazing things in our each of our lives that will change our entire way of thinking, broadening our outlook. Consider again the attitude of the elder brother in the parable of the prodigal son, **Luke 15:28-32**. Such a challenge so we do not miss out on a great blessing of including all people into His family, which is so diverse and inclusive.

In the Acts, Luke is keen to emphasize to us the strong, dramatic and extensive growth of the Church. This is the Church of Jesus Christ and within 40 years it had spread to every corner of the known world. We are now part of that extensive and exciting worldwide movement if we have given our lives to Jesus in repentance, asking Him to forgive us our sins and to take control of our lives, becoming our Lord. If you mean what you say, you will notice a difference from the moment you say the words!

Peter had a real passion to tell all people about Jesus and the salvation all can receive as He had paid the ultimate price. Peter had changed his attitude as soon as the Holy Spirit had shown him where he was wrong and he remembered what the Lord said: 'Yes, John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' **Acts 11:16**. Peter, in astonishment, thought through the full implications of what this meant not just to himself but to all the Jews. 'And since it was *God* who gave these Gentiles the same gift he gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to argue?' **Acts 11:17**

### **The Holy Spirit fell on them – Acts 11:15-17.**

A further part of the blessings of our salvation is the baptism in the Holy Spirit, which is God's means of bringing us into the realm of spiritual power. He wants us not only to enjoy the new life He has given us, to live in obedience having victory over our flesh, but also to be effective messengers in transmitting the gospel to others, **Acts 1:8; Acts 2:4**.

Let us look at five questions which will help us to understand the Scripture and lead us into all the blessings of walking in the Holy Spirit today, **Acts 2:17**.

#### **1. Who is to be baptised in the Holy Spirit?**

This blessing is not just for a select few, but for all believers. God has promised, "I will pour out my Spirit on all people." **Acts 2:17**

Peter clearly proclaimed concerning the gift of the Holy Spirit: "The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for **all** whom the Lord our God will call ". **Acts 2:39**

#### **2. Why be baptised in the Holy Spirit?**

- a. Through the baptism in the Holy Spirit we receive power (**Acts 1:8**) and ability **Acts 9:17-22**.
- b. We are enabled to pray in the Spirit and sing praises in the Spirit, especially if we don't know how to pray. This is distinct from normal prayer and praise expressed in our own language, **Romans 8:26-27** and **1 Corinthians 14:15**.
- c. Our own spirit becomes more sensitive to the "voice of God's Spirit," **Acts 13:2, Mark 13:11, Acts 1:1,2**.
- d. We become eligible for the Gifts of the Spirit, (**Acts 19:6**) and a new level of God's power in our lives, **1 Corinthians 14:1,2; 1 Corinthians 1:5-7, Acts 1:8**.
- e. We begin to live our daily lives "in the Spirit", by the Spirit's power and should be constantly being filled with the Spirit, **Ephesians 5:18 and Colossians 3:16**.

#### **3. How do we receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit?**

Sometimes God baptises believers in the Spirit by a sovereign act. This is what happened to the disciples on the day of Pentecost (**Acts 2**) and to the household of Cornelius in **Acts 10**. At other times, it is received by the laying on of hands, as in Samaria, **Acts 8; Acts 19:6**.

Individually however, we receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit in the same way we receive all the blessings of God .....by faith.

In **Luke 11:13** AMP Jesus says 'even though we are evil we know how to give good gifts to our children how much more will our heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask and continue to ask Him!' It is so important that we continue to ask as it is a continually being filled situation, **Ephesians 5:18**. Out of us shall flow rivers of living water, **John 7:38**. This can only be the pure power of His Holy Spirit. So we see that it is important that we **ask** Him for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Having prayed, believing God has heard our prayer; we begin to praise God and worship Him with thanksgiving. This is a powerful means of drawing near to His presence to receive the Holy Spirit. "Come near to God and He will come near to you." **James 4:8**.

As we become aware of the presence of the Holy Spirit there is a breaking within us and our spirit springs up to respond to the Spirit of God. At this point, an anointed servant of God may lay hands upon us to impart the Holy Spirit, just as Paul did in **Acts 19:6**, but this is not always necessary and is not what happened with Cornelius.

#### **4. Must those who receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit ALWAYS speak in tongues?**

This is a wrong question! In **1 Corinthians 14:5**, Paul says, "I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy." What he is saying is that **we should both speak in tongues and also prophesy**. When we receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit we **can** speak in tongues, we **should expect** to speak in tongues, provided we do not let prejudice or fear hinder the flow of the Holy

Spirit. According to **James 3:8** the tongue is the hardest member of the body to tame, and God wants to demonstrate His mighty power in the toughest member first. So we can expect to speak in tongues when we are baptised in the Holy Spirit. **Expect also to prophesy.**

As the Holy Spirit rests upon us He stimulates us to praise the Lord. Our own words seem inadequate to praise God as we should and the Holy Spirit then leads and encourages us **Romans 8:26,27**; but **never forces** us to speak in tongues, enabling our organs of speech to form strange words and syllables as we yield to His prompting. Once we begin we should expect the language to be spontaneous and fluent. We will not understand the words we are saying, nor should we expect to, "for anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God. Indeed, no one understands Him because He utters mysteries in the Spirit." **1 Corinthians 14:2**. There will then be no doubt, either to ourselves or others, as to whether or not we are filled with the Holy Spirit, **Acts 10:46-48**. There should be no sense of superiority as all the Gifts of the Holy Spirit are used with humility and grace, not for show or one-up-man-ship. At all times they should draw us closer to Jesus and be used for the building up of the Body not just ourselves.

### 5. Have you received the Holy Spirit since you believed?

Once people are prepared to listen to Jesus Himself and to be obedient to His calling on their lives, instead of to dead tradition and discrimination that Peter had held onto, then we will see a great desire amongst those who are without God to come closer to find out if His interest in their lives is real, **Acts 11:12**. Since it is within every believer's power to cleanse their conscience before God and man, and to **ask** for the gift of the Holy Spirit, we believe that we should all experience Holy Spirit baptism. Why not ask your Heavenly Father and then thank Him by faith for the gift He has given you. How else are we going to 'love our neighbours as ourselves especially if we receive opposition unless we have the power of the Holy Spirit living in us?

The questions that we need to ask of ourselves are:

1. Do others know that you are a disciple of the Lord Jesus, and if the answer is 'No', then why is that?
2. Are you prepared for others to ask questions of you? and
3. If they do ask, could you tell them what to do about their lives with the confidence of one who knows from your own experience that God will resolve their issues?

### Acts 11:19-30.

Those who had been scattered during the persecution following the death of Stephen were such people. They were not prepared to hold back on the truth that would change the lives of their new acquaintances in Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch. Persecution has that effect on Christians. It hardens the resolve, making them fearless in the face of danger. These are the very same people who, together with their families and friends would face the terrors of crucifixion, being thrown to the lions and other wild animals, and becoming objects of ridicule and subject to cold-blooded death in the various stadia around the Roman Empire. What made them so very different? The answer has to be - the very presence of the Lord Himself, **Acts 11:19-21**.

Some of these people were bold enough to speak to Greeks as well as Jews. You don't have to guess what happened. The same thing as happened to Cornelius. So now Peter was not the only person to see the Holy Spirit being poured out on the Gentiles. And instead of being met with criticism as we read about at the beginning of this Chapter, we read that encouragement came from those who were left behind as leaders in Jerusalem.

When the church at Jerusalem heard what had happened, they sent Barnabas to Antioch to help the new converts. Here we read that Barnabas (the same Barnabas who helped Saul when the apostles didn't believe that he had changed) when he saw what had happened in Antioch, not only was excited but he encouraged the believers to stay close to



the Lord whatever the cost. Barnabas was a kindly person, full of the Holy Spirit and strong in faith. As a result, large numbers of people were added to the Lord, **Acts 11:22-24**.

Barnabas understood there is often a cost to becoming a Christian and being a Christian by oneself is a lonely experience, so he encourages them to stick close to the Lord and be in fellowship with others. When we are alone, we are far more likely to give up and compromise the faith that we have just begun to understand and walk in, but when we are together with other Christians, it is so exciting to be built up and to walk in the strength and fullness of the Gift of God through our Lord Jesus Christ. It is great to be together seeing all that God is doing for all members of His family. To be able to call on all members of a Church to pray when going through a life-threatening trauma, children, financial or marriage problems can be very encouraging as we humble ourselves and acknowledge we need help. We are part of the Body of Christ, His Bride, so we cannot say we love the Head but do not like the Body, after all it is His!!

**'Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He Who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another and all the more as you see the Day approaching'. Hebrews 11:23-25.**

### **This is so vital at this time in His-story!**

Barnabas did not just stop there, he also set off in pursuit of Saul, and when he found him in Tarsus, he brought him to Antioch, **Acts 11:25-26**. It was at this time that Saul and Barnabas developed a working relationship that was to ignite parts of what is now called Turkey as they set off on what we know as Paul's First Missionary Journey. Saul and Barnabas worked together in the Church at Antioch teaching great numbers of people.

It was in Antioch that the Believers were first called Christians. The word Christ was not Jesus' second name as some think. It actually means 'Anointed' and the sense of the word includes His anointing. So, Jesus Christ means 'Jesus the anointed One and His anointing'. The word Christian means 'little anointed one'. It was here in Antioch that people realised how much the children of God bore His likeness – except that it was not a physical likeness, but a strong and marked spiritual resemblance to Jesus that they possessed. As they walked around in the Power of Jesus, they discovered that they could do the same things that He did while He was on earth.

Luke gives us an example of this likeness to their Lord Jesus that the disciples possessed. 'During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch,<sup>28</sup> and one of them, named Agabus, stood up in one of the meetings to predict by the Spirit that a great famine was coming upon the land of Israel. (This was fulfilled during the reign of Claudius.)<sup>29</sup> So the believers decided to send relief to the Christians in Judea, each giving as much as he could.<sup>30</sup> This they did, consigning their gifts to Barnabas and Paul to take to the elders of the church in Jerusalem', **Acts 11:27-30**. Great that Agabus had the courage to give the prophetic word by the Holy Spirit, as this will have saved lives as well as allowing the believers to be blessed in giving.

Barnabas and Saul were trusted people. The Believers, in response to the prophecy given by Agabus, (and we shall hear more of him in a later Chapter) gave gifts to help those Believers living in Judea to enable them to survive the famine that gripped the entire Roman Empire during Claudius' reign. The disciples gave according to their means but it was Saul and Barnabas who were given the responsibility of delivering it.

When people look at you, do they see your honesty and integrity as you respond to God? Do they see your undoubted heart to help them, and your desire for their spiritual well-being? If you will set yourself on the same path as God, then you will be a changed person, and you will see blessings and power flow from you to others as you fulfil God's lifetime plan for you.

But be warned; it will take courage, inner strength and not a little tenacity to row against the natural tide of spiritual oppression that stems from the world.

## The Acts of the Holy Spirit 13 – The Jews unite with the Gentiles – Challenge Questions

Please complete all questions marked with \* and then complete the rest of the study. The more you look in the Word the more you will get out of it. Read the chapter at the beginning of the week then you have time to meditate on it, rather than rushing! Make the Word your number one priority.

1. \***Read the Notes and the Bible Verses** referred to in them. Highlight the points that really spoke to you and share with the group.
2. \***Acts 1: 8** refers to four stages in the evangelism of the world that Jesus commissioned the Apostles to undertake. What were they, and in which order did Jesus tell them to do what He asked?
3. \*How many of the stages referred to in Question 2 had the disciples begun to undertake, and how many remained at this stage? Who was in command of this embryo enterprise?

### **Read Acts 12:1-19**

4. \*Why did Herod take up the fight against the Christians? Which two apostles in particular did he move against? What happened to them?
5. Two people named James are mentioned in this Chapter. The first one mentioned (**Acts 12:2**) was John's brother. Who was the second one related to, and what was his position in the Church at this time?
6. \*Peter was arrested and thrown into prison under armed guard 24 hours a day. The Believers had only one weapon with which to fight. What was it? Did they expect it to be effective? How effective was it really?
7. \*Define prayer in a single sentence and be prepared to share it in your group. Explain why prayer is important to you in your life. Can you share any results that you have been involved with recently?
8. When Herod threw Peter into prison, why did he post such a strong guard (16 soldiers) over him? Did he have any experience to warrant this size of guard? (Consider **Acts 5** and the Resurrection of Jesus **Matthew 27:61 – 28:7**)

9. \*Was the guard that Herod placed over Peter effective? How many angels did it take to overcome them? What was the fate of the guards and why?
10. **Matthew 10:28-31** tells us who to be afraid of and who not to be. Who should we **NOT** fear and why? Was Peter afraid of Herod? Explain your answer.
11. Peter thought that he was dreaming as the angel led him out of the prison. Give two examples of when he discovered he wasn't
12. \*Peter was obedient to what the angel said to do as he was led out of prison. Why do we have to be obedient to what God says as we live our lives?
13. \*Were the believers excited to see Peter and to hear what God had done for him? Do you think that they were encouraged? Do you think that the prayer meeting was more **effective** after Peter's release than before?

**Read Acts 12:20-25**

14. God made Herod to look foolish in the eyes of the Romans. Why do you think Herod went to live in Caesarea (the main city of the Romans) for a while? What did he do while he was there?
15. \*Herod died in Caesarea. Of what did he die?
16. Do you think that Herod was justified in thinking that he was a god? Why do you think God judged Herod when He leaves other people, allowing them to see the error of their ways?
17. \*Write a sentence to say what you have learnt from this study.