

## Acts 11

### *Gentiles are first to be called Christians*

#### **Learning Objective(s)**

- Confirmation that the Gentiles are now a part of the community of Jewish believers.
- That God grants Gentiles the ability to believe, repent and receive the Holy Spirit.
- The result of Gentiles coming to faith was that they went out of their way to help their Jewish brother and sisters.

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**?** A title is supposed to reflect what a person is capable of and known for. So think about a title you've always wanted and share with the group why you would want this title.

*Leaders Note: The goal of this question is for you to use this later when we discuss how the Gentiles were first called Christians and how they achieved this just like their hopes in achieving the title they want.*

#### **Read Out Loud: Previously In Acts**

The book of Acts shows how the Holy Spirit – working through early Christians – helped spread the Gospel and build the global church. Acts 10 begins to describe how Christianity is not just for the Jew, but also for everyone. The first part of Acts 10 introduces us to Cornelius, a powerful military leader of Rome with a strong faith and a rich desire to know more about Christ. The second part of Acts 10 describes how Peter gets a vision of how Gentiles are now apart of the family of God and what God has made clean we should not call unclean. This chapter is the beginning of the apostles bringing Gentiles into Christianity.

#### **Read Out Loud: Acts 11: 1-3 (NIV)**

1 The apostles and the believers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. 2 So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him 3 and said, “You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.”

**?** Who were the circumcised believers in vs. 2?

*Possible Answers: These would have been the Jews who had made strict rules for themselves not to eat with people who did not adhere to the law in ways they did.*

**?** Why were they criticizing Peter for eating with uncircumcised men?

*Possible Answers: They looked down on people who did not live by the same laws they did, so to associate with them in any way, especially inviting them to eat with you and associate with them, was frowned upon majorly.*

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In what ways might Christians criticize other Christians today?

*Possible Answers: look down on people of different social class, different denominations, theological values, political positions, and spiritual maturity.*

**Read Out Loud: Acts 11:4-18 (NIV)**

4 Starting from the beginning, Peter told them the whole story: 5 “I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. I saw something like a large sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to where I was. 6 I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, reptiles and birds. 7 Then I heard a voice telling me, ‘Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.’ 8 “I replied, ‘Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’ 9 “The voice spoke from heaven a second time, ‘Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.’ 10 This

**Definition of a Gentile:** Those who are not physical descendants of Abraham and were therefore regarded as being excluded from the promise made to him and his descendants. The Gentiles are often referred to as “the nations” in OT writings.

**Gentiles in OT**

Under the OT, Gentiles were generally excluded from the worship of the synagogue and from all the privileges of being Jewish. However, the OT made provision for non-Jews who believed in the God of Israel.

**Gentiles in NT**

Although Jesus Christ initially preached to Israel, his mission was soon extended to the Gentiles. From the outset, the Christian church accepted Gentiles as full members, refusing to make any distinction between Jew and Gentile. Paul, “the apostle to the Gentiles”, laid particular emphasis on their role in the purposes of God.

*Martin H. Manser, Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies (London: Martin Manser, 2009).*

happened three times, and then it was all pulled up to heaven again. 11 “Right then three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea stopped at the house where I was staying. 12 The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered the man’s house. 13 He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, ‘Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. 14 He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.’ 15 “As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. 16 Then I remembered what the Lord had said: ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ 17 So if God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God’s way?” 18 When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, “So then, even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life.”

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Why was Peter so strict about not eating unclean food?

*Possible Answers: Peter was Jewish. See Leviticus 11 for the details. Leviticus gives very strict rules*

*about what a Jew could eat and what they couldn't eat. This is what we would call "kosher" today.*

**?** How does Peter then justify eating with Gentiles (vs. 4 -18)?

*Possible Answers: God gives Peter a vision that it is ok to eat any kind of meat. This is because of the new covenant that was ushered in after Christ ascended into heaven. The new covenant supersedes the old and there are no longer dietary restrictions. The dream Peter had told him to make no distinctions between the Jews and the Gentiles, (Which means "Nations").*

**?** What are the implications of this passage (vs. 17-18) for the Gentiles?

*Possible Answers: no distinction between food, no distinction between ethnicity, the Gentiles also have the opportunity to be discipled (i.e. discipled by Paul & Barnabas)*

**?** What was the result of the Gentiles coming to faith?

*Possible Answers: They received the Holy Spirit, their whole household was saved, God has granted them repentance that leads to life (vs. 18)*

*Leaders Note: The following question may come up, "How does someone receive the Holy Spirit and is there a difference between the baptism to the Holy Spirit?" If it does, please refer your people to the Acts 2 (3 part) sermon series.*

*You can also check out this post from Desiring God:*

<http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/what-does-it-mean-to-receive-the-holy-spirit>

**?** In vs. 12 the Holy Spirit speaks to Peter. How does the Spirit speak to us today?

*Possible Answers: The Holy Spirit can speak at any time in any way he wants, it is up to us to actually listen. However, the primary way that he speaks to us is through the Scripture that he inspired to be written. So, one thinks they are being spoken to by the Holy Spirit, they must make sure it doesn't contradict Scripture.*

**?** What is significant about the timing of the baptism of the Holy Spirit on the Gentiles, and Peter's arrival (vs. 15-17)?

*Possible Answers: The Holy Spirit was demonstrating the unity within all believers. Had the Holy Spirit come down to the Gentiles without the Jews being present, they would have thought they had their own separate religion or didn't need the apostles' approval. With the Holy Spirit waiting to fill the Gentiles, it showed that they, although very different culturally and ethnically, were now one in God through Jesus.*

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What does the term “repentance that leads to life” mean in vs. 18?

*Possible Answers: This “life” that is referenced is the new life that one receives from putting their faith in Christ. This is the new birth, or “being born again” that we see Jesus talking about in John 3.*

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Verse 18 says that the apostles glorified God when they heard the Gentiles received the Holy Spirit.

How can we be glorifying God more when people come to Christ?

*Possible Answers: We might think when other churches experience growth that we are doing something wrong, rather we should think that we are all on the same team preaching the gospel of Christ and rejoice at their “success.”*

#### **Read Out Loud: Acts 11:19-30 (NIV)**

19 Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. 20 Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. 21 The Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord. 22 News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. 23 When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. 24 He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord. 25 Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, 26 and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch. 27 During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) 29 The disciples, as each one was able, decided to provide help for the brothers and sisters living in Judea. 30 This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

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When Barnabas goes to Antioch what does he do when he sees the Gentiles? (vs. 23)

*Possible Answers: He encourages them to remain faithful to the teachings of Jesus, not tell them they need to adhere to the old Jewish customs.*

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How did the Gentiles gain the first reputation of being Christians (vs. 26)?

*Possible Answers: They genuinely reflected Jesus in how they lived.*

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How can we as believers remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose?

*Possible Answers: Love Jesus, stay faithful to a local church, tell others about our Savior, etc.*

**?** As a small group, what are some specific things we can do to reflect faithfulness to one another?

*Possible Answers: Keep each other accountable, daily encourage one another, contact each other with prayer requests, etc.*

#### **For Discussion and Accountability**

**?** What is an obstacle that is hindering you from being faithful to the Lord?

**?** As Christians today, what can we be doing to ensure that people have a positive view of Christianity?