

The Way
Birth of the Church
Lesson 08: Gospel Spreads to Gentiles; Believers' Persecuted
We are indebted to [Ethnos360](#) for providing the basis of these lessons

Review (Where We've Been)

Characteristics of the Birth of the Church...

- Empowered by the Holy Spirit to be witnesses

Acts 1:8 (ESV) But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

- Given boldness in the face of persecution

Acts 8:1 (ESV) And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

- Proclaimed the Gospel beyond the Jews (starting with the house of Cornelius)

Acts 10:34 (NLT) So Peter opened his mouth and said: “Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, **35** but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.”

BIG Idea

We must remember that it has *always* been God’s plan to offer salvation to *all people* through the Deliverer promised to Abraham.

Genesis 12:3 (ESV) “...in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

Galatians 3:8 (ESV) ...the Scriptures looked forward to this time when God would make the Gentiles right in his sight because of their faith. God proclaimed this good news to Abraham long ago when he said, “All nations will be blessed through you.”

Although you would think that the believing Jews would be happy about the salvation of the Gentiles, there were many problems with cultural barriers.

God would need to work to change hearts from their *own perception* to *His purpose and plan* to rescue the nations from sin through Jesus.

God prepared Peter’s heart through a vision...now He would need to change others.

Information (What You Need to Know)

Actions after Peter's Visit to the House of Cornelius...

▪ **Jewish believers criticized Peter's entrance into a Gentile's home**

- ✓ Some Jews were offended by Peter eating/fellowshipping with Gentiles

Acts 11:1 (ESV) Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. **2** So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, **3** “You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them.”

“*The circumcision party* were Christian Jews who believed Jesus was the Deliverer, but also believed that the Gentile believers must strictly follow all the ways of the Jews, including circumcision.” – Firm Foundations

- ✓ Peter explained to his critics what God had shown him in a vision

Acts 11:4 (ESV) But Peter began and explained it to them in order: **5** “I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision, something like a great sheet descending, being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to me. **6** Looking at it closely, I observed animals and beasts of prey and reptiles and birds of the air. **7** And I heard a voice saying to me, ‘Rise, Peter; kill and eat.’ **8** But I said, ‘By no means, Lord; for nothing common or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’ **9** But the voice answered a second time from heaven, ‘What God has made clean, do not call common.’ **10** This happened three times, and all was drawn up again into heaven. **11** And behold, at that very moment three men arrived at the house in which we were, sent to me from Caesarea. **12** And the Spirit told me to go with them, making no distinction.”

“There is a sense in which the sheet represents the church, having both ‘kosher’ (Jews) and ‘unkosher’ (Gentiles) on it, with no distinction or dividing line between the two.” – David Guzik

- ✓ The minds of these Jewish believers were changed

Acts 11:15 (ESV) “As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. **16** And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ **17** If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God’s way?” **18** When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, ‘Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.’”

“It was clear to them that God had accepted the Gentiles, even though they were uncircumcised, so they were glad, and they stopped opposing Peter.” – Firm Foundations

- **Jews, scattered by Stephen's persecution, spread out to teach the gospel**

Acts 11:19 (ESV) Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. **20** But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. **21** And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord.



- ✓ Believing Jews scattered to preach to Jews in Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch
- ✓ Believers from Cyprus and Cyrene preached to the Gentiles in Antioch
Antioch is the first example of believers deliberately targeting Gentiles for evangelism, which saw a great number believe.

- **Barnabas and Saul ministered at Antioch**

- ✓ The Jerusalem church sent Barnabas to make sure those at Antioch were teaching what had been taught by the apostles

Acts 11:22 (ESV) The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. **23** When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, **24** for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord.

- ✓ Barnabas and Saul invested a year into helping mature the believers at Antioch
Acts 11:25 (ESV) So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, **26** and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.

Application (What You Need To Do):

Although this was an exciting time for the church, persecution resumed.

Acts 12:1 (ESV) About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. **2** He killed James the brother of John with the sword, **3** and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also.

What was the response to Peter's arrest?

- The church prayed for Peter

Acts 12:5 (ESV) So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.

- God did the impossible by sending an angel to release Peter from prison

Acts 12:7 (ESV) And behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, "Get up quickly." And the chains fell off his hands. **8** And the angel said to him, "Dress yourself and put on your sandals." And he did so. And he said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me." **9** And he went out and followed him. He did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. **10** When they had passed the first and the second guard, they came to the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord, and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel left him. **11** When Peter came to himself, he said, "Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting."

- The praying church is surprised that they got what they prayed for

Acts 12:12 (ESV) When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. **13** And when he knocked at the door of the gateway, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer. **14** Recognizing Peter's voice, in her joy she did not open the gate but ran in and reported that Peter was standing at the gate. **15** They said to her, "You are out of your mind." But she kept insisting that it was so, and they kept saying, "It is his angel!" **16** But Peter continued knocking, and when they opened, they saw him and were amazed. **17** But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison.