

Learn to Read Acts Effectively

Distance Learning Programme

Session 6

Session 6

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Session 6 - The message goes to non-Jews

Acts 10 and 11

- Persecution by Herod Acts 12

Introduction

We have seen how the Jews needed to be convinced that Jesus was the promised Messiah who would fulfil the promises made by God in the Old Testament. This message was spread among the Jews. In this session we see how the same message began to be taken to people other than Jews. God was beginning to make His plan relating to the Messiah known to all nations as previously promised in the Old Testament.

Before looking at the notes you will find it helpful to read Acts 10 and 11.

Summary of Acts 10 and 11

The church includes non-Jews

Cornelius and Peter see visions	10 v 1 to 23
Peter preaches to Cornelius and his household	10 v 24 to 43
Baptism of Cornelius and his household	10 v 44 to 48
Peter convinces the Jews that non-Jews can be saved	11 v 1 to 18
Preaching work in Antioch	11 v 19 to 26
Relief sent to Judea	11 v 27 to 30

Acts 10 v 1 to 23 - Cornelius and Peter see visions



Read Acts 10 v 1 to 23

Acts 10 v 1 There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment,

2 a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always.

As one of the first non-Jewish converts, Cornelius was chosen by God as a suitable person to receive the gospel message.

If we look at the references from this verse it will show us what kind of people we should be to be receptive to God's message:

**X-Refs-
Devout**

Acts 10 v 7 and 22; 22 v 12.

- Cornelius was not only devout himself, he influenced others as well - he had a devout soldier
- He feared God
- Despite being a representative of an occupying power, he had a good reputation among the Jews
- Ananias had respect for the law of Moses

**X-Refs-
One who
feared God**

Job 1 v 1; Daniel 6 v 26.

- Like Job, Cornelius shunned or kept away from evil
- King Darius reminds us that we should fear God because He is all-powerful

**X-Refs-
Who
gave alms**

Psalm 41 v 1; Acts 9 v 36; 10 v 31.

- Psalm 41 reminds us that God will remember those who have helped others when they themselves in turn need help
- We have seen the example of Dorcas, who helped others
- God remembers our good deeds

**X-Refs-
Prayed
to God**

Psalm 86 v 3; Daniel 6 v 10; Luke 18 v 1 to 8; Colossians 4 v 2.

- Psalm 86 encourages us to pray at all times so that we may receive God's mercy
- If you read Daniel 6 you will see that Daniel continued praying despite the problems this would bring him
- Jesus' parable of the unjust judge assures us that we will be heard if we pray to God
- Colossians 4 reminds us that prayer should also include thanksgiving



We have looked at some of the characteristics that made Cornelius acceptable to God. We should try to follow his example.

Verses 3 to 5 tell us that an angel told Cornelius to send for Peter, who was at that time at Joppa. Map 3 on page 2 of the *Additional Notes* shows where Joppa was in relation to Caesarea where Cornelius lived.

Acts 10 v 6 "He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. He will tell you what you must do."

This verse tells us that, despite his good character, Cornelius still had to do something more. We shall see what this was later on in this session.

Verses 7 and 8 show that Cornelius obeyed the angel's request and sent two household servants and a soldier to Joppa.

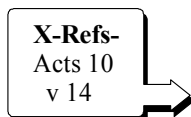
Verses 9 to 16 tell us that the next day Peter had a vision as the men sent by Cornelius were on their way to see him.

Acts 10 v 11 and [Peter] saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth.

12 In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air.

13 And a voice came to him, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat."

These were all creatures regarded as "unclean" under the law of Moses, and were not to be eaten, as the cross-references from verse 14 remind us:



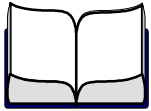
Leviticus 11; 20 v 25.

Acts 10 v 15 And a voice spoke to him again the second time, "What God has cleansed you must not call common."

This verse contains the central message for Peter. He was told not to regard as common or unclean things that God had cleansed. We shall understand the relevance of this message as we see events unfold.

Verses 17 to 23 tell us that Peter was still wondering what the vision meant when Cornelius' men arrived at the house looking for him. In verse 20 we are told that Peter was encouraged to go with the men and speak to Cornelius. Peter was being helped to understand that the vision was telling him that he must no longer regard non-Jews as unclean and outside God's plan.

Acts 10 v 24 to 43 - Peter preaches to Cornelius and his household



Read Acts 10 v 24 to 43

In verses 24 to 29 Peter explained to Cornelius how God had recently shown him that he must no longer regard anyone as unclean. Cornelius then told Peter about his own vision and asked Peter to give him his message from God.

Acts 10 v 34 Then Peter opened his mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality.

35 "But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him."

The Jews at this time thought they were better than the rest of the nations. But Peter was having to learn that this was not the case, and that all nations could turn to God. The cross-references indicate that the Old Testament clearly told the Jews that God did not show partiality, and neither should they. The references also teach us that God shows favour to *all* who fear Him:

X-Refs-
Acts 10
v 34 and 35

Deuteronomy 10 v 17; 16 v 19; Psalm 85 v 9; Proverbs 1 v 7;
Isaiah 56 v 3 to 8.

Acts 10 v 36 "The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ—He is Lord of all—"

The cross-references from the various phrases in this verse remind us what this gospel message is all about:

**X-Refs-
Preaching
peace**

Psalm 72 v 1 to 3 and 7; Isaiah 9 v 6 and 7; Luke 2 v 10 to 14;
2 Corinthians 5 v 18 to 21.

- Psalm 72 gives a picture of the peaceful reign of Christ
- Isaiah 9 talks of Christ being the “Prince of Peace”, and of the peace he will establish
- Luke 2 v 10 to 14 tells us that Jesus Christ is the Saviour who brings peace
- 2 Corinthians 5 tells us that Jesus Christ was the means of restoring the relationship between God and men

The references from “He is Lord of all” lead us to some of the Bible passages that told the Jews about the coming of their promised deliverer - the “Messiah” or “Christ”. The references also lead us to the implications of Jesus being “Lord of all”:

**X-Refs-
He is Lord
of all**

Psalm 2 v 6 to 8; 110 v 1 and 2; Jeremiah 23 v 5 and 6; John 5 v 23 to 29;
Romans 10 v 11 to 13.

The promised “Messiah” or “Christ”:

- will have the nations for his inheritance
- will rule over his enemies
- will be a descendant of David and will rule justly

Because Jesus is “Lord of all”:

- He has the power and authority to raise us from the dead and give us life
- All people who call on his name can be saved

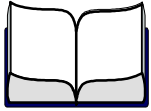
In verses 38 to 43, Peter gives a similar message to that in Acts 2:

<u>Verse</u>	<u>Message</u>
38 and 39	The disciples were witnesses that Jesus performed miracles
39	Jesus was killed
40	God raised him on the third day - he was seen by the disciples
41	The disciples were witnesses that Jesus really did rise from the dead
42	Jesus commanded the disciples to preach that Jesus is to be judge of all
43	The Old Testament prophets foretold that we can have our sins forgiven through him

In Acts 2 and 3 he was talking to the Jews. Here, Peter's speech to Cornelius was the start of the message to the rest of the world.

In the table on page 15, we have compared Peter's message in Acts 2 and 3 with his message to Cornelius.

Acts 10 v 44 to 48 - Baptism of Cornelius and his household



Read Acts 10 v 44 to 48

Acts 10 v 44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word.

The Holy Spirit was first given when the message was preached to the Jews on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). God was now reinforcing His intention to treat Jews and non-Jews in the same way in future. All could now be part of His plan.

Acts 10 v 45 And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also.

The Jews had no option but to accept that non-Jews could now be part of God's purpose. The cross-references show that this is a recurring theme in the rest of the New Testament:

X-Refs-
Acts 10 v 45

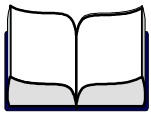
Galatians 3 v 13 and 14; Ephesians 2 v 11 to 13; 3 v 5 to 8.

- Through Jesus all can now be involved in the promise which was given to Abraham the father of the Jews
- Gentiles who were once "without hope" now have a hope of salvation through Jesus' sacrifice
- Paul had been chosen to preach to non-Jews

Acts 10 v 47 "Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?"

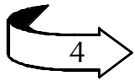
Peter then suggested that Cornelius and those whom he had gathered together to hear the message should be baptised. Again we see that baptism followed acceptance of God's message.

Acts 11 v 1 to 18 - Peter convinces the Jews that non-Jews can be saved



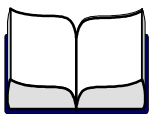
Read Acts 11 v 1 to 18

Verses 2 and 3 remind us of the reluctance on the part of the Jews to accept the fact that they had to regard non-Jews as equal to themselves. This is understandable; we see national pride in our own day on many issues, and they would have been no different from us. This is possibly one of the main reasons why the Holy Spirit was visibly active at this time - to show, in a way that no one could argue with, that God was indeed accepting people other than the Jews.



Peter then explained to the Jews exactly what had happened. As we saw in verse 47 of Acts 10, he reasoned that if God was giving his approval by the Holy Spirit, he could not argue. The rest of the Jews agreed, in verse 18, that Gentiles could now have "repentance to life".

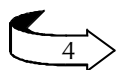
Acts 11 v 19 to 26 - Preaching work in Antioch



Read Acts 11 v 19 to 26

Verse 19 tells of those who were scattered as far as Antioch in Syria as a result of the persecution following Stephen's death. They probably had not heard about the conversion of Cornelius and that God had indicated that non-Jews could now be saved. So they continued to preach only to Jews.

Verse 20 then shows that preaching to non-Jews was also spreading and had reached Antioch.



The work of the Holy Spirit

Acts 11 v 21 And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.

The cross-references from the “hand of the Lord” show that the expression is found several other times:

X-Refs-
Hand of
the Lord

→ 2 Chronicles 30 v 12; Ezra 7 v 9; Isaiah 59 v 1; Luke 1 v 66.

All these passages indicate that the “hand of the Lord” is God’s power to direct and protect, often in apparently natural ways where it is not obvious that God is at work.

If you would like to delve more into this fascinating subject have a look at the following echoes, which will give you more idea of how God’s “hand” works. Compare your findings with the notes on page 14.

Exodus 9 v 3

Ruth 1 v 13

Job 12 v 9 and 10

Deuteronomy 2 v 14 and 15

1 Samuel 12 v 15

Ezekiel 33 v 22

Joshua 4 v 24

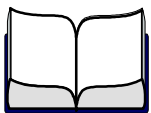
2 Chronicles 30 v 12

Judges 2 v 15

Ezra 7 v 6 and 28

Verses 22 to 26 tell of the church at Jerusalem sending Barnabas to Antioch, where he encouraged them in the work. This would in effect be the Jerusalem church giving their approval to the work being done at Antioch. From there Barnabas went to Tarsus to find Saul. He then brought him to Antioch to help in the preaching work.

Acts 11 v 27 to 30 - Relief sent to Judea



Read Acts 11 v 27 to 30

The *Treasury of Scripture Knowledge* tells us that this famine was the one which took place in the fourth year of Claudius, which continued for several years, and in which, according to *Josephus* “many died for want of food”.

Barnabas and Saul were sent from Antioch with the relief for the believers in Judea.

This section again reminds us that, in addition to the preaching work, the first-century church was concerned when any of its members had problems. This willingness to help fellow believers is referred to in the letters of Paul, as the cross-references show:

X-Refs-
Acts 11
v 29 → Romans 15 v 25 to 27; 2 Corinthians 9 v 1 and 2; Galatians 2 v 10.

Another echo in the New Testament expands this principle that our faith must result in action:

Echo -
Faith should
produce
action → James 2 v 14 to 18.

- Faith on its own is lifeless
- Our faith is demonstrated by our actions



God requires that we both trust in His message and guide our actions by that message.

Acts 12 - Persecution by Herod

Introduction

In this chapter we see persecution resulting from the growing political opposition. But after God removed the instigator of this persecution the church continued to grow.

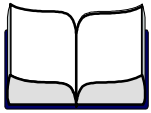
It will be helpful to read Acts 12 before looking at the notes.

Summary of Acts 12

The church includes non-Jews

Persecution by Herod	12 v 1 to 4
Peter freed from prison	12 v 5 to 19
Herod's death	12 v 20 to 25

Acts 12 v 1 to 4 - Persecution by Herod



Read Acts 12 v 1 to 4

Acts 12 v 1 Now about that time Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some from the church.

Here we see the results of Herod's "hand" stretched out in hatred, in contrast to the helpful "hand of the Lord" which we looked at on page 8.

The cross-references show that Jesus warned that persecution would come to his followers:

X-Refs-
Acts 12 v 1

Matthew 10 v 17 and 18; John 15 v 20; 16 v 2.

- Jesus warned that the persecution would come from governors and kings - people with power and authority
- All this persecution would occur because people would not want to know Jesus or his message
- People would think that they were helping God by killing the followers of Jesus

Verses 2 to 4 relate how Herod killed James and arrested Peter.

Acts 12 v 3 And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. Now it was during the Days of Unleavened Bread.

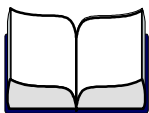
The cross references show examples when Paul, like Peter, was persecuted for political reasons:



Verse 4 tells us that Peter was delivered to “four squads of soldiers”. Ellicott’s *New Testament Commentary* 1897, Vol. II Page 77, tells us what this meant:

“[Herod] Agrippa apparently followed the lessons of Roman practice which he had learnt by his own experience. The four quaternions relieved each other at set times, and the prisoner was chained to two of the soldiers of each company, while the others were stationed as sentinels at the door of the dungeon.”

Acts 12 v 5 to 19 - Peter freed from prison



Read Acts 12 v 5 to 19

We have already seen that prayer was a vital part of the early church, so prayer was offered at this time of crisis, as verse 5 tells us.

Verse 6 tells us that Peter was sleeping. This was a great testimony to his faith in God. Many of us would have spent that night worrying about what was going to happen to us in the morning.

Verses 7 to 11 tell us of the dramatic rescue of Peter by an angel of God. We look at the work of the angels on page 12 of the “Work of the Holy Spirit” section in the *Additional Notes*.

Verses 12 to 17 relate that Peter went to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, to let the believers know that he had been miraculously released from prison.

Acts 12 v 15 But they said to her "You are beside yourself!"

Though they had been praying for Peter, they found it difficult to believe it when their prayers were answered.

The cross-references tell us that the disciples showed similar disbelief when they were told that Jesus had risen:

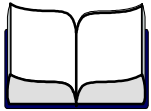
X-Refs-
Acts 12
v 15

→ Mark 16 v 11 and 14; Luke 24 v 11.

We notice from verse 17 that Peter did not stay at the house of Mary where he could easily be found by Herod next morning. Peter went into hiding and did not presume on God delivering him again. We have to do what we can and not assume God will do everything for us.

Verses 18 and 19 relate Herod's anger at losing his prisoner. Herod was a merciless, brutal man, and we can see that his merciless brutality came on anyone, including his own soldiers, who upset his selfish plans.

Acts 12 v 20 to 25 - Herod's death



Read Acts 12 v 20 to 25

Verses 20 to 23 give the details of Herod's death. We notice that God again sent an angel. This is an example of the angels acting to ensure that God's plan is not hindered.

Verses 24 and 25 tell us that the work of preaching the gospel then progressed, possibly because the main persecutor, Herod, had been removed.

In the next session we shall see how the message went further and further through the Roman Empire by the means of the Apostle Paul, whom we have up to now known as Saul.

Summary of Session 6

In chapter 10 we have seen how non-Jews became involved in God's promises initially given to Jews in the Old Testament:

- Peter was persuaded to tell Cornelius, a Gentile, about God's plan through Jesus
- Cornelius gathered his relations and friends together to hear what Peter had to say
- To show His approval, God gave the gift of the Holy Spirit to those who heard Peter's message
- Cornelius and those gathered in his house were then baptised

In chapter 11:

- Peter convinced the Jewish believers in Jerusalem that non-Jews could now be saved
- Barnabas and Saul travelled to Antioch to help in the preaching work
- From Antioch, Barnabas and Saul took help to famine-stricken Judea

In chapter 12:

- Herod attempted to stop the preaching and arrested Peter
- Despite his imprisonment by Herod, Peter's faith in God was unmoved
- God sent an angel to release Peter so that he could continue preaching
- Herod died



Again, we have had several challenges:

- We should follow the example of Cornelius and try to:
 - * Be God fearing
 - * Help others
 - * Pray to God
- We should remember that God's hand is at work often in unseen ways
- God wants us to both trust His message and be guided in our actions by the message

Questions

1. What have you learnt about God's plan with non-Jews?
2. What did Cornelius have to do when he heard the message from Peter?

Self-study notes

The hand of the Lord (page 8)

- God's "hand" was behind the plagues on Egypt, but the Egyptians were unaware of this - to them it was another natural disaster (Exodus 9 v 3)
- Many of the generation that died in the wilderness probably died of "natural" causes, but God was behind it all (Deuteronomy 2 v 15)
- The drying up of the Jordan was a visible demonstration of God's hand at work (Joshua 4 v 24)
- When Israel forsook God He delivered them into the hand of foreign powers. To Israel it would have seemed natural, but God was in control (Judges 2 v 15)
- The disasters in Naomi's life would all have seemed natural, but she recognised that God was behind them (Ruth 1 v 13)
- The Jews were warned that God's hand would be against them, if they disobeyed Him, in the same apparently natural way that it had been against their fathers (1 Samuel 12 v 15)
- In Hezekiah's time "God's hand" was on the people encouraging them to obey Him (2 Chronicles 30 v 12)
- Ezra saw the hand of God in the approval of the king which enabled him to return to the land of Israel (Ezra 7 v 6 and 28)
- Job acknowledged that "the hand of the Lord" was behind all the troubles that had come on him, because God is in control of all life (Job 12 v 9 and 10)
- God's hand on Ezekiel controlled whether the prophet could speak or not (Ezekiel 33 v 22)



We can see that "God's hand" covers all aspects of God's work. Sometimes it is obvious that He is working and sometimes not.

Summary of the message given by Peter in Acts 2, 3 and 10

Message (session and page)	Acts 2 & 3	Message to Cornelius	Acts 10
Jesus was a man having our nature (1, 13)	2 v 22 and 30		
The miracles Jesus did were evidence that he was sent by God (1, 14)	2 v 22	The disciples witnessed that Jesus performed miracles	v 38 and 39
It was part of God's plan that Jesus should die as a sacrifice for our sins (2, 6)	2 v 23; 3 v 14, 15 and 18	Jesus was killed	v 39
God raised him to life again (1, 14 and 16; 2, 4)	2 v 24, 31 and 32; 3 v 15	God raised him on the third day - he was seen by the disciples	v 40 and 41
The Holy Spirit was given as a witness (1, 16 & 19)	2 v 33 and 38	The disciples witnessed that Jesus had the Holy Spirit	v 38 and 39
God promised David a special descendant (1, 16)	2 v 30		
God promised Abraham a special descendant who would bring blessings on all nations (2, 9)	3 v 25	Anyone who fears God is accepted by Him	v 34 and 35
The special descendant was the Lord Jesus Christ (1,17; 2, 9)	2 v 30 and 36; 3 v 26	Jesus Christ is Lord	v 36
We can now have our sins forgiven through Jesus (2, 7 & 10)	2 v 38; 3 v 19 and 26	The prophets foretold forgiveness of our sins through Jesus	v 43
To be part of God's plan we must repent (1, 17; 2, 6)	2 v 38; 3 v 19	God accepts those who work righteousness	v 35
We must then be baptised (1, 18)	2 v 38	Baptism commanded	v 47 and 48
God has glorified Jesus and we must have faith in the name of Jesus the Prince of life (2, 4 & 5)	3 v 13 to 16	God sent His message of peace to us through the work of Jesus Christ	v 36 and 37
All the present problems will be solved when God has "refreshed" the earth (2, 6 & 7)	3 v 19	God's message to Israel included peace	v 36
Jesus will return to the earth and establish his endless kingdom (2, 7)	3 v 20 and 21		
		Jesus will be judge of all	v 42

Notes

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