

ACTS 11:1-18 JEWISH-CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO GENTILE SALVATION: PETER'S DEFENSE

The report of the salvation of the Gentile house of Cornelius in Caesarea soon spread to all of Judaea including home-base Jerusalem. That no circumcision, no Jewish restrictions, no Mosaic Law codes, no long-standing traditions were part of this salvation raised grave doubts and questions for these Jewish believers. How were saved Jews and Gentiles to relate to one another in the church? Were saved Jews to lay aside hundreds of years of tradition and law keeping that came from God? The immediate and long-range result: tension between saved Jews and saved Gentiles in the early church. Acts 11 records the first manifestation of this tension.

11:1-3 RESPONSE OF EARLY JEWISH CHRISTIANS TO GENTILE SALVATION

v. 1 **The Report:** accurate news of Gentiles receiving God's Word (salvation) and Peter's revolutionary behavior in entering a Gentile's house reached Jewish believers throughout Judaea.

"the Gentiles" = εθνη/ethne, peoples, ethnic groups; to a Jew, "heathen," "pagans," the *goyim*

v. 2 **The Negative Response:** in one word - alarm! Peter runs into perpetual disagreement with Jewish believers who in essence oppose a salvation for Gentiles that does not include circumcision and other Jewish practices (such as avoiding social contact!)

"they of the circumcision" = believers, like those who accompanied Peter to the house of Cornelius (10:45)

"contended," a key word: they "disagreed," "took issue" with Peter. The verb is imperfect middle indicative. See 10:20 and 11:12 where the same verb was used to encourage Peter to go with the Gentiles and disagree with nothing. BY THE WAY: WHO WERE THE TEACHERS OF THESE CONTENDERS?

v. 3 **The Contention:** "You entered a house of uncircumcised men and ate (aorist tense) with them." To a Jew, not only were the Gentiles unclean, so was their food; it was not *kosher*.

This is the link between Peter's vision (*"What God has cleansed, call thou not common,"* 9:15) and his subsequent application of that lesson: i.e., ceremonial laws are abrogated.

11:4-17 PETER'S DEFENSE AND EXPLANATION

Peter will now rehearse the entire matter to the Eleven and all interested parties in Jerusalem. Throughout this explanation, he attributes the actions to God, not to himself.

v. 4, 5 God initiated these events by sending a vision.

v. 6-8 God commanded me to eat "unclean" meat; I resisted.

(OVER)

- v. 9 God corrected me about the fact that ceremonial laws against meats are now annulled.
- v. 10 God reinforced His message by sending it three times!
- v. 11, 12 It was the Spirit of God that commanded me to go with these Gentiles to Caesarea.
- v. 12, 13 It was an angel from God that told Cornelius to send for me.
- v. 14 It was God's desire that I tell these Gentiles how to be saved.
- v. 15, 16 It was the Holy Spirit himself that fell upon these Gentiles as I was speaking (just as the Lord predicted).
- v. 17 **Peter's Conclusion**: "*Since God did this, how could I (emphatic) withstand Him?*" (NASV – "*How could I stand in His way?*").

"God gave them the like gift as unto us:" the same gift, the equal gift (ισην/isen) given to us at Pentecost.

NOTE THE ORDER: "having believed (aorist participle) upon (epi) the Lord Jesus, God gave (aorist active indicative) the same gift." They believed and immediately were given the Holy Spirit and were baptized by Him into the Body of Christ.

11:18 CONCLUSION IN RESPONSE TO PETER'S EXPLANATION

A two-fold response is recorded in v. 18:

1. "*they held their peace,*" that is, "they quieted down." The implication is that they had been quite boisterous about this issue, but could counter nothing to Peter's explanation.
2. "*they glorified God.*" They expressed praise and glory to God over the salvation of Gentiles! At last the Jerusalem church admitted the principle of evangelizing Gentiles without making them Jews!

The practical problems when large scale Gentile evangelism begins did not arise at this time; those come 5-7 years later when Paul makes his first missionary journey. But now it is official; Jews and Gentiles alike may experience God's grace equally and fully. Paul states the doctrine emphatically in Gal. 3:28 and Col. 3:11.

"TO THE GENTILES (US), GOD HAS GRANTED ALSO CHANGE OF MIND UNTO LIFE (ETERNAL)".

-Acts 11:18