



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

## **New Testament Survey**

### **Lesson 19 – The Gospel Goes Out to the Gentiles**

#### **A Light to the Gentiles**

Before He ascended to heaven, Jesus said to His apostles: **“You shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth”** (Acts 1:8). On the day of Pentecost many Jews from many different countries heard the Gospel in Jerusalem from the apostles. The Bible does not tell us what happened to these Jews afterwards, but no doubt they took the Gospel back to their home countries. The apostles themselves stayed in Jerusalem for some time, even after persecution had driven the Jewish Christians from Jerusalem into Judea, Samaria, Galilee, and Syria.

One of the seven deacons, Philip, brought the Gospel to an Ethiopian eunuch, who probably took the Gospel to his country in Africa. After Saul became a Christian, he took the Gospel to his hometown, Tarsus in Cilicia.

At first the apostles restricted their preaching to Jews and to Gentiles who had become proselytes (converts) to the Jewish religion. They also brought the Gospel to the Samaritans, who only accepted the five books of Moses. But the vast heathen world was not yet their mission field. It took a special vision of God to the apostle Peter for the apostles to realize that the Gospel of Jesus was intended also and equally for non-Jews (Gentiles).

Cornelius was a Gentile soldier in Caesarea who had accepted Jewish teaching but knew very little about Jesus and the Gospel. God directed Cornelius by a vision to contact Peter and invite him to come to Caesarea to bring the Word of God to him and his family and friends. God directed Peter by a vision to accept this invitation and go to Cornelius' home to preach the Gospel there. As the people gathered in the home of Cornelius heard the Gospel, the Holy Spirit worked faith in Jesus in their hearts. The Holy Spirit also blessed them with the same miracles that had taken place on Pentecost in Jerusalem as a testimony to Peter and the other apostles. Now the apostles knew that their mission was to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews. In fact, God wanted to join both the believing Jews and the believing Gentiles into one Christian family: the Holy Christian Church.

Soon the Gospel was being preached to Greek Gentiles in Antioch of Syria, and they were brought to Christ in large numbers. The church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas from Jerusalem to Antioch to guide the growing congregation. Barnabas then went to Tarsus to get Saul to join him in this work. Antioch in Syria became the center for mission work to the Gentiles.

Back in Jerusalem times were hard for the Christians. Many were very poor, and they gladly accepted help from the Christians in Antioch. Herod Agrippa I, who was now ruling over all Palestine, tried to please the unbelieving Jews by executing the apostle James, Zebedee's son. James was the first apostle to be put to death for his faith in Christ. This took place in 44 AD. Herod Agrippa I tried to kill Peter also, but Peter escaped from Herod's hands through the intervention of an angel of God.

Read the listed passages as you study each of the events below.

*Peter heals Aeneas at Lydda and raises Dorcas from the dead at Joppa* (Acts 9:32-43)

Note: Dorcas societies, which provide clothing to the poor, are named after this woman who made coats and garments for others.

*Cornelius, a Gentile soldier in Caesarea, sees a vision from the Lord* (10:1-8)

As a result of this vision Cornelius sent three men to fetch Peter from Joppa.

*Peter receives the vision of the sheet from heaven containing unclean food* (10:9-18)

The voice said to Peter: **"Rise, Peter; kill and eat"** (v. 13). At first Peter refused.

Again the voice spoke: **"What God has cleansed you must not call common"** (v. 15).

Note: In this way God Himself did away with the Jewish food laws.

*Peter and six others go to Caesarea with the three men from Cornelius* (10:19-33)

This was contrary to Jewish practice, but Peter explained: **"God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean"** (v. 28).

*Peter preaches **Sermon 4** to Cornelius and his friends* (10:34-43)

**"I perceive that God shows no partiality"** (v. 34).

**"We are witnesses of all things which He did"** (v. 39).

**"Him they killed by hanging on a tree. Him God raised up the third day"** (vv. 39-40).

**"Whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins"** (v. 43).

*The Holy Spirit is poured out on these Gentiles, just as at Pentecost* (10:44-48)

Peter: **"Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized?"** (v. 47).

*Peter explains the events in Caesarea to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem* (11:1-18)

**"If God gave them the same gift as He gave us ... , who was I that I could withstand God?"** (v. 17).

*Certain Gentiles in Antioch of Syria are brought to faith in Christ* (11:19-21)

Note: First the Gospel went to the Jews only; then also some Greeks believed.

Barnabas goes to Antioch and seeks the assistance of Saul (11:22-26) [43 AD]

The Antioch Christians send relief to Jerusalem through Saul and Barnabas (11:27-30)

King Herod Agrippa I kills the apostle James and imprisons Peter (12:1-5)

The hatred of the unbelieving Jews for the Christians is obvious; this execution pleased the Jews.

The angel of the Lord delivers Peter from the prison (12:6-11)

**“Peter was sleeping, bound with two chains between two soldiers”** (v. 6).

The angel led Peter out of prison and through the iron gate of the city.

Peter appears to the disciples gathered in Mary's home – Mary was Mark's mother (12:12-19)

When Peter knocked at the door, the maid Rhoda recognized his voice, but no one believed her at first.

Peter told them to notify James (the brother of the Lord), who had become the head elder of the Jerusalem congregation.

Herod commanded the prison keepers to be put to death because of Peter's escape.

Herod Agrippa I dies of a terrible disease (12:20-25) [44 AD]

**“He was eaten by worms and died. But the word of God grew and multiplied”** (v. 23-24).

### **The Letter of James, the Brother of the Lord**

The letter of James in the New Testament was probably addressed to Jewish Christians in Jerusalem and Judea in the early years of the Christian Church when there were as yet not many Gentiles in the Church. It was probably written in the years from 30 to 45 AD and so the very first letter of the New Testament to be written.

The author was James, the brother of Jesus, that is, a half-brother, having the same mother but not the same father. Mary had three other sons also: Simon, Judas/Jude<sup>1</sup>, and Joses/Joseph<sup>2</sup>, as well as some daughters. This James is sometimes known as “James the Just”.

There are three Important men in the Bible whose names were James:

- James, the brother of John, whose father and mother were Zebedee and Salome (Mary's sister).

---

<sup>1</sup> He is called Judas in Matthew 13:55 and Mark 6:3, but the name is translated as Jude in Jude 1:1.

<sup>2</sup> He is called Joseph in Matthew 13:55 and Joses in Mark 6:3.

- James, the son of Alphaeus, known as “James the Less”. He was one of the twelve apostles.
- James, the brother of Jesus, the author of this letter.

This James did not believe in Jesus until after His resurrection. After Jesus rose from the dead, He appeared to James (1 Corinthians 15:7). James waited for the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem along with the apostles, his three brothers, and the women, including Mary (Acts 1:14). James became a leader in the congregation at Jerusalem. By 44 AD, when Peter was imprisoned, James was the head elder of the Jerusalem congregation.

In order to win his fellow-Jews for faith in Christ, James continued to practice the Jewish customs and to obey the Jewish laws until his death as a martyr in 66 AD. Four years after his death Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed by the Romans, which made Jewish worship impossible. Jude (Judas), who wrote a New Testament letter, was a brother of this James.

The books of the New Testament can be divided into two kinds: those accepted by all Christians from the very beginning, and those spoken against by some in the early church. The letter of James is one of those books that was spoken against and not accepted by all Christians from the beginning.

In his letter James preaches against the sin of hypocrisy in a way very similar to how Jesus, his brother, preached against it. This was a sin very prominent among the Pharisees and other leading Jews in Jerusalem. In many ways the teaching of James is similar to Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount.

Read the book of James and note the following divisions:

*Do not blame God for your sins; they are your own fault* (1:13-15).

*We should not only hear the Word of God but do the Word of God* (1:22-25).

*We should not favor the rich over the poor* (2:1-13).

*Faith without works is dead* (2:14-26).

*Is it possible to control the tongue?* (3:1-10).

*Humility, not pride, is the Christian way* (4:1-12).

*We should not make plans for the future without thinking of God* (4:13-16).

*We should be patient like Job* (5:7-11).

*We should pray like Elijah* (5:13-18).

*It is important that we admonish our erring brother* (5:19-20).

## James and Paul

Many Christians have been troubled by the fact that James and Paul do not seem to agree on the relationship between faith and good works. But they do *not* disagree at all in their teaching. Paul's emphasis is on the Gospel's teaching that we receive forgiveness of sins and salvation alone by faith in Christ without the works of the law. James does not disagree with this teaching, but James emphasizes that genuine faith in Christ always results in the doing of good works. James says: **"I will show you my faith by my works"** (James 2:18). Thus, a man is declared righteous in the sight of God through faith in Christ without any consideration of his works, but a man shows his faith in Christ before men by what he does, just as Abraham showed that he believed God's promise of the Savior by obediently being willing to offer up his son Isaac as an offering to God. Paul does not disagree with James, for Paul also speaks of **"faith working through love"** (Galatians 5:6).

Both Paul and James teach the power of the Gospel of Christ to bring people to faith in Christ. Paul wrote: **"Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God"** (Romans 10:17). In a similar way James wrote: **"Of His own will He (God) brought us forth by the word of truth ... Therefore ... receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls"** (James 1:18-21).

## Questions

---

1. What is the difference between Jews and Gentiles?
2. Why were the apostles hesitant to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles?
3. How did the Lord persuade Peter to visit the Gentile Cornelius?
4. What amazing thing happened as Peter preached the Gospel in Cornelius' home?
5. What was the subject matter of Peter's sermon in Cornelius' home?
6. Why was it wise for Peter to take six men with him on his visit?
7. Why did the church in Jerusalem send Barnabas to Antioch in Syria?
8. What made the congregation in Antioch different from the congregation in Jerusalem?
9. What was Herod Agrippa I hoping to do to Peter?
10. How did Peter escape from the hands of Herod Agrippa I?
11. Which James wrote the letter of James in the New Testament?
12. List some of the topics discussed by James in his letter.
13. What did James mean when he said that faith without works is dead?