

THE LOOKOUT

NOVEMBER 2023

Unit: Acts (Part 2)

Theme: The Church Goes Global

Overview: Shrunk spirits and miserly hearts have no place in God's global mission. His plans are always larger than ours (Genesis 1:28; 11:4, 9; 12:3; Isaiah 49:6; Daniel 7:13-14; Zechariah 9:9-10). Clearly God's mission for the church has always been worldwide. The International Conference on Missions realizes this; the theme for their gathering Nov. 16-18 in Oklahoma City is "Hope for the Nations." In Part 2 of this study from Acts, students will learn of this global mission by studying one family (Cornelius's household), a first journey (by Paul and Barnabas), and two cities (Ephesus and Rome).

HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.

WEEK OF NOVEMBER 8, 2023

LESSON AIM: Celebrate the inclusiveness of God's love and grace.

SCRIPT: Acts 10:1-11

THEME: The Church Goes Global

LESSON TEXT: Acts 10:1-11, 34-35

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Acts 10:1-11, 34-35, 11:1-18

STUDY

SCRIPTURES ARE ADDED TO THE CHURCH
BY PAUL SCOTT

After the initial and difficult work of the Bible study, the next step is to apply the truths of the Bible to our lives. This is the purpose of the study. The Bible is not just a book to be read, but a book to be lived. The study is designed to help you understand the Bible and to apply its truths to your life. The study is divided into two parts: the first part is the Bible study and the second part is the application. The Bible study is designed to help you understand the Bible and the application is designed to help you apply the truths of the Bible to your life. The study is designed to be used in a group or class setting. The study is designed to be used in a group or class setting. The study is designed to be used in a group or class setting.

Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.

GO WHEREVER GOD SENDS YOU
BY DAVID FAUST

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DISCOVERY

BY DAVID FAUST

1. How do you think you are being used by God? How do you think you are being used by God? How do you think you are being used by God?
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Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

WEEK OF NOVEMBER 5, 2023

LESSON AIM: **Celebrate the
inclusiveness of God's
love and grace.**

UNIT: Acts (Part 2)

THEME: The Church Goes Global

LESSON TEXT: Acts 10:17-24, 34-48

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Acts 10:1-16, 25-33; 11:1-18

GENTILES ARE ADDED TO THE CHURCH

BY MARK SCOTT

Acts is the simplest and earliest name of this Bible book. The fuller and later title of the book, *Acts of the Apostles*, must probably give way to a more accurate name, *Acts of the Holy Spirit*. The main job of the Holy Spirit in Acts is to lead the church forward in its mission. When we arrive in our reading at Acts 10, we realize it is a big moment. The length of the narrative is one clue to its significance (Acts 10:1—11:18).

Luke's account of the beginning and growth of the church has led up to this point. Jesus promised that his witnesses would reach to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Peter said God would pour out his Spirit on all people (2:17). The saving name of Jesus is for everyone "under heaven" (4:12). Stephen's speech in Acts 7 helped the church to see how its message fulfilled its roots in Judaism, yet also unshackled it from them. Philip preached to the Samaritans and the Ethiopian eunuch (8:5, 34, 35). Peter stayed with a "tanner" named Simon while in Joppa (9:43), which prepared him for his heavenly vision and the Gentiles being added to the church.

The Spirit Said

Acts 10:17-23a

The Holy Spirit is a speaking Spirit. Like the Father and the Son, *He Is There and He Is Not Silent* (to co-opt the title of a book by Francis Schaeffer). Cornelius prayed regularly and God answered with an angel who instructed Cornelius to summon Peter to his Caesarean residence (Acts 10:1-8). God, in turn, prepared Peter via a vision as the apostle prayed on a rooftop in Joppa (10:9-16).

While Peter wondered about the meaning of the vision, the Spirit told Peter that three men had come for him, men whom the Spirit had sent. The Spirit then told Peter to *go downstairs* and not *hesitate* (the Greek word used means discriminate or second guess) going with them because the whole event was being orchestrated by God.

Peter identified himself to Cornelius's men. They vouched for Cornelius's character and told Peter the events recorded earlier in the chapter. In a strange turn of events, Peter *invited the men into the house to be his guests*. That might not seem surprising in light of Ancient Near Eastern hospitality, but the ethnic ramifications are stunning.

The Spirit Anointed

Acts 10:23b-24, 34-43

Peter could not have been more fully prepared for the scene that awaited him. He arrived at Cornelius's house

and found everything in perfect order for the preaching of the gospel (Acts 10:25-33). Peter staying at the home of a tanner was wild, but a Roman soldier bowing to a Jewish fisherman was wilder still! Peter acknowledged he was out of his comfort zone, but God had dramatically changed his perspective.

That new perspective is seen in Peter's opening words in verse 34—*God does not show favoritism* (literally, does not regard the face). God accepts people from every nation, and so should the church. The biblical basis for such a radical first-century claim was rooted in Jesus' own ministry. The rest of Peter's sermon was about the Holy Spirit anointing Jesus to preach this all-embracing gospel. The *message* (word) *God sent to the people of Israel was the good news of peace* (see also Ephesians 2:11-22). That peace established through the complete work of Christ on the cross broke down barriers between Jew and Gentile.

Peter retraced the ABCs of Jesus' ministry. First there was the preaching of John the Baptist. Then came Jesus' baptism and empowerment (anointing) by the Holy Spirit to conduct his ministry. Jesus healed people and went about *doing good*. He died on Calvary's cross and was raised from the dead. Many people witnessed these things since they were not done in a corner (Acts 26:26). Peter claimed post-resurrection encounters with Jesus. Apostolic preaching would cause people to decide for or against Jesus. They could choose to be judged or forgiven by him.

The Spirit Came

Acts 10:44-48

It seems that Peter never got to conclude his message. Once the basic kerygma (Christian message or gospel) was shared, the Holy Spirit came. It was like reliving Pentecost. The *circumcised believers* (Jewish Christians) *who had come with Peter were astonished* that the Holy Spirit had accepted the Gentiles into the church before the church had accepted them.

One evidence of the Holy Spirit's descent was *speaking in tongues* (or known human languages, so that all the Gentiles could understand the gospel). Peter—perhaps the most "kosher" of all disciples—recommended water baptism since these events were identical to what had occurred in Acts 2. The events in Acts 10 marked a significant milestone in the progress of the gospel message. ■

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APPLICATION

GO WHEREVER GOD SENDS YOU

BY DAVID FAUST

I spent a week in Turkey last summer. My travel group toured Istanbul and visited the sites of the seven churches mentioned in Revelation 2 and 3. In every town, Muslim calls to prayer rang in the air five times a day, amplified by loudspeakers from local mosques.

The journey increased my appreciation for first-century missionaries and for the brave believers serving Jesus in Turkey today. Our tour was tiring, even though we had air-conditioned buses and modern hotels. Imagine what it was like for the apostles who traveled on foot or by boat. Paul wasn't kidding when he wrote about facing danger in the city, the country, and the sea (2 Corinthians 11:26). Yet, God's first-century ambassadors went wherever he sent them to spread the good news.

Messages Tailored to the Churches' Needs

Jesus tailored each of his Revelation letters to the specific circumstances of the seven churches. At Pergamum, we took a cable car to the top of an 1,100-foot-high hill and viewed the ruins of pagan temples, theaters, and intimidating Roman military installations that overshadowed first-century Christians like a devilish throne and threatened their safety every time they looked up. Christ assured the believers in Pergamum, "I know where you live—where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name" (Revelation 2:13). He knows where we live, too.

We saw hot springs flowing from the ground at Hierapolis and a cold-water spring near the site of ancient Colosse. Nearby, we toured the ruins of first-century Laodicea, where Christ's followers were neither hot nor cold, but lukewarm (Revelation 3:15-16).

Changing Circumstances

Time has changed those ancient cities. Hierapolis receives only a passing mention in the New Testament—a quick reference in Colossians 4:13—but impressive archaeological remains show that it was a thriving metropolis in the first century. I walked

across the site of Colosse, which is now a field covered with thistles. Ancient Smyrna, however, has become a thriving metropolis known as Izmir, and our departing flight left from its modern airport. Over the centuries, these areas were altered by political and economic factors and by earthquakes and fires. Some cities thrived and grew, while others declined and eventually disappeared.

If the Lord delays his return and visitors tour our communities 2,000 years from now, will they see the abandoned remains of our theaters, stadiums, and malls? What will our church buildings look like then?

I'm thankful for congregations that thrive in growing communities, but what about Christ's faithful followers who serve in places where declining job markets and depressed economies have caused residents to move away? Across the globe, some local churches reap the benefits of explosive population growth, financial prosperity, and favorable governmental policies, while many other congregations struggle to accomplish their mission under adverse conditions. Without making excuses for non-growth, let's humbly recognize that local churches are affected by political shifts, natural disasters, and spiritual dynamics invisible to human eyes. Lost souls need Jesus, whether they live in America or in the Middle East—in booming suburbs, remote villages, or crowded cities.

After 2,000 years, the gospel continues to be "the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile" (Romans 1:16). We should trust God's providence and go wherever he leads us—even to unfamiliar and uncomfortable places. Our job is to plant and water gospel seeds and leave the results to him.

Personal Challenge: Do you know any missionaries or church planters who are serving in parts of the world where living conditions are difficult and resistance to the gospel is strong? Pray for them and write them a note of encouragement. **L**

DISCOVERY

BY DOUG REDFORD

1. Did you follow up on “doing good and helping” in one of the areas mentioned at the conclusion of last week’s set of Discovery Questions? What did you do? (Consider how you can continue this service to others on a regular basis.)
2. When was the last time that you gathered with a group that included relatives and/or close friends? What memories do you have of that occasion?

Ask two people to read aloud **Acts 10:17-24, 34-48** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passages.

3. Acts 10:24 says that Cornelius was expecting Peter’s arrival and had contacted his relatives and close friends.
 - What do you think the mood or atmosphere was like in Cornelius’s house as they awaited Peter’s arrival?
 - What might the group have talked about?
4. Have you ever been in a situation where someone showed favoritism and you were the person ignored/overlooked/rejected/ridiculed as a result? What was your initial reaction?
 - Have you ever witnessed the above scenario happening to someone else? What was your reaction? Do you wish you had reacted differently? How?
5. What influences in today’s culture can cause us to “show favoritism” or treat certain people differently?
6. How should the fact that God does not show favoritism impact the way I view my relationship with him? The way I pray? The way I treat others (in the workplace, at school, in my neighborhood, in daily contacts)?
7. What do you learn about Jesus from Peter’s words to Cornelius and those gathered with him?
8. Peter spoke of the “good news of peace through Jesus Christ” (Acts 10:36). How would you define or explain the peace that Jesus brings?
9. The circumcised believers were “astonished” when they saw the Holy Spirit being poured out on Gentiles (Acts 10:45). Have you ever been “astonished” at something God did or provided for you? Describe what happened.
10. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: “I will . . .”
11. Ask yourself, “In what areas of my life do I tend to show favoritism or treat people in a way that does not honor God? Is there a specific individual whom I have not treated with proper respect or dignity?” Create a plan for addressing this during the upcoming week.

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Acts 13:1-13, 26-31, 38-39**. You can also read next week’s supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. 