



## The Church Led by the Holy Spirit (Acts 11:1-18)

*Notes: Week Nineteen*

### Acts 11:1-18 (NIV)

#### Peter Explains His Actions

**11** The apostles and the believers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. <sup>2</sup> So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him <sup>3</sup> and said, “You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.”

<sup>4</sup> Starting from the beginning, Peter told them the whole story: <sup>5</sup> “I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. I saw something like a large sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to where I was. <sup>6</sup> I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, reptiles and birds. <sup>7</sup> Then I heard a voice telling me, ‘Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.’

<sup>8</sup> “I replied, ‘Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’

<sup>9</sup> “The voice spoke from heaven a second time, ‘Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.’ <sup>10</sup> This happened three times, and then it was all pulled up to heaven again.

<sup>11</sup> “Right then three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea stopped at the house where I was staying. <sup>12</sup> The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered the man’s house. <sup>13</sup> He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, ‘Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. <sup>14</sup> He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.’

<sup>15</sup> “As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. <sup>16</sup> Then I remembered what the Lord had said: ‘John baptized with<sup>[a]</sup> water, but you will be baptized with<sup>[b]</sup> the Holy Spirit.’ <sup>17</sup> So if God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God’s way?”

<sup>18</sup> When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, “So then, even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life.”

#### Footnotes:

- a. [Acts 11:16](#) Or *in*
- b. [Acts 11:16](#) Or *in*

## Acts 11:1-18 (HCSB)

### Gentile Salvation Defended

**11** The apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles had welcomed God's message also. <sup>2</sup> When Peter went up to Jerusalem, those who stressed circumcision<sup>[a]</sup> argued with him,<sup>3</sup> saying, "You visited uncircumcised men and ate with them!"

<sup>4</sup> Peter began to explain to them in an orderly sequence, saying: <sup>5</sup> "I was in the town of Joppa praying, and I saw, in a visionary state, an object that resembled a large sheet coming down, being lowered by its four corners from heaven, and it came to me. <sup>6</sup> When I looked closely and considered it, I saw the four-footed animals of the earth, the wild beasts, the reptiles, and the birds of the sky. <sup>7</sup> Then I also heard a voice telling me, 'Get up, Peter; kill and eat!'

<sup>8</sup> "No, Lord!' I said. 'For nothing common or ritually unclean has ever entered my mouth!' <sup>9</sup> But a voice answered from heaven a second time, 'What God has made clean, you must not call common.'

<sup>10</sup> "Now this happened three times, and then everything was drawn up again into heaven. <sup>11</sup> At that very moment, three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea arrived at the house where we were. <sup>12</sup> Then the Spirit told me to accompany them with no doubts at all. These six brothers accompanied me, and we went into the man's house. <sup>13</sup> He reported to us how he had seen the angel standing in his house and saying, 'Send<sup>[b]</sup> to Joppa, and call for Simon, who is also named Peter. <sup>14</sup> He will speak a message<sup>[c]</sup> to you that you and all your household will be saved by.'

<sup>15</sup> "As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came down on them, just as on us at the beginning. <sup>16</sup> Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' <sup>17</sup> Therefore, if God gave them the same gift that He also gave to us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, how could I possibly hinder God?"

<sup>18</sup> When they heard this they became silent. Then they glorified God, saying, "So God has granted repentance resulting in life<sup>[d]</sup> even to the Gentiles!"

### Holman Christian Standard Bible - *Study Bible*<sup>1</sup>

*Acts 11:1-18*

**11:1-3** News that **Gentiles had welcomed God's message** spread quickly because it was so controversial. Jews who **stressed circumcision** felt Peter had compromised God's laws. This was a recurring source of conflict in the early church, but, informed as he was by the vision from God, Peter corrected those who argued against inclusion of uncircumcised Gentiles ([vv. 4-18](#)).

**11:14-17** The parallel between what happened on Pentecost and among Cornelius's family proved that God was bestowing the same gifts on Jewish and Gentile believers. In this light, Peter rightly asks, **How could I possibly hinder God?**

**11:18** **They became silent** indicates initial caution. These Jewish believers were having to process the same shocking revelation that had come to Peter at Joppa and then Caesarea ([10:9-16,44-48](#)). Eventually, however, **they glorified God** for what He had done.

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1. Jeremy Royal Howard, ed., *HCSB Study Bible*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Acts 11".

## English Standard Version - *Study Bible*<sup>2</sup>

Acts 11:1-18

**11:1-18** *Peter's Testimony in Jerusalem.* The final scene of the Cornelius narrative takes place in Jerusalem, where some of Peter's fellow Jewish Christians questioned his acceptance of the Gentiles. Peter defended his action by retelling the events of the Gentile conversions with an emphasis on God's leading. This is basically a summary of [ch. 10](#), with only a few added details.

**11:1** The **apostles and the brothers** do not seem to have raised objection to the inclusion of Cornelius and his fellow Gentiles. The issue was raised by "the circumcision party" ([v. 2](#)), a group of strict Jewish Christians, perhaps of a Pharisaic background (see [15:1, 5](#)). They probably held the position that Gentiles who wished to become Christians must first become converts to Judaism, which included circumcision and living by the ritual laws.

**11:3** On eating with **uncircumcised men**, see note on [10:28](#).

**11:12** Peter was to make **no distinction** or discrimination between Jews and Gentiles.

**11:14** **a message by which you will be saved.** Some think this implies that Cornelius was saved for the first time here. Others think he previously had saving faith (as a Gentile "God-fearer" looking forward to the Messiah), but that this meant he would experience the fullness of new covenant salvation in Christ when he heard the gospel message (see notes on [10:2](#); [10:35](#)).

**11:15** **Just as on us** refers to Pentecost, apparently meaning that these Gentile believers began to speak in tongues and praise God, giving convincing evidence that they had received the Holy Spirit in the same sense as did those at Pentecost. See also [10:44-48](#) and note on [10:47](#). The fact that the Spirit came to Cornelius and other Gentiles without them having done anything in relationship to the Law is God's answer to the debate and settled matters as far as Peter was concerned.

**11:17** **stand in God's way.** Here Peter used the same word (Gk. *kōlyō*) as in the earlier account of Cornelius's conversion ([10:47](#), "withhold"), and the Ethiopian eunuch used the same word at the time of his conversion ([8:36](#)). As these three examples demonstrate, God was expanding the church to include Gentiles, and no one should try to "prevent" or "stand in the way" of that. Though Peter did not explicitly refer to baptism, it was probably implicit in the use of this word: Peter knew he could not refuse to allow these new believers to be baptized and thereby give outward evidence that they were full members of the church.

**11:18** **they glorified God.** Though it is taken for granted today that Gentiles can become Christians, it was an astounding realization for these Jewish Christians in Jerusalem that **to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.** On repentance, see note on [2:38](#). This move was significant given the history of tension between Gentiles and Jews, especially in light of the Maccabean War. Reconciliation is a key theme of the gospel.

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2. Lane T. Dennis, ed., *ESV Study Bible, The: English Standard Version*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Bibles, 2008), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Acts 11".

## NLT Life Application Study Bible<sup>3</sup>

*Acts 11:1-18*

**11:1-3** A Gentile was anyone who was not a Jew. Most Jewish believers thought that God offered salvation only to the Jews because God had given his law to them ([Exodus 19-20](#)). A group in Jerusalem believed that Gentiles could be saved, but only if they followed all the Jewish laws and traditions—in essence, if they first became Jews before becoming Christians. Both groups were mistaken. God chose the Jews and taught them his laws so they could bring the message of salvation to *all* people (see [Genesis 12:3](#); [Psalm 22:27](#); [Isaiah 42:4](#); [49:6](#); [56:3-7](#); [60:1-3](#); [Jeremiah 16:19-21](#); [Zechariah 2:11](#); [Malachi 1:11](#); [Romans 15:9-12](#)).

**11:2-18** When Peter brought the news of Cornelius's conversion back to Jerusalem, the believers were shocked that Peter had eaten with Gentiles. After they heard the whole story, however, they praised God ([11:18](#)). Their reactions teach us how to handle disagreements with other Christians. Before judging the behavior of fellow believers, it is important to hear them out. The Holy Spirit may have something important to teach us through them.

**11:8** God had promised throughout Scripture that he would reach the nations. This began with his general promise to Abraham ([Genesis 12:3](#); [18:18](#)) and became very specific in Malachi's statement: "But my name is honored by people of other nations from morning till night" ([Malachi 1:11](#)). But this was an extremely difficult truth for Jews, even Jewish believers, to accept. The Jewish believers understood how certain prophecies were fulfilled in Christ, but they overlooked other Old Testament teachings. Too often we are inclined to accept only the parts of God's Word that appeal to us and support our own agendas, ignoring the teachings we don't like. We must accept all of God's Word as absolute truth.

**11:12ff** Peter's defense for eating with Gentiles was a simple restatement of what happened. He brought six witnesses with him to back him up, and then he quoted Jesus' promise about the coming of the Holy Spirit ([11:16](#)). These Gentiles' lives had been changed, and that was all the evidence Peter and the other believers needed. Changed lives are an equally powerful evidence today.

**11:16** Jesus had also demonstrated clearly that he and his message were for all people. He had preached in Samaria ([John 4:1-42](#)); in the region of the Gerasenes, populated by Greeks ([Mark 5:1-20](#)); and he even had reached out to Romans ([Luke 7:1-10](#)). The apostles shouldn't have been surprised that they were called to do the same.

**11:18** The intellectual questions ended, and the theological discussion stopped with the report that God had given the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles. This was a turning point for the early church. They had to accept those whom God had chosen, even if they were Gentiles. But joy over the conversion of Gentiles was not unanimous. This continued to be a struggle for some Jewish Christians throughout the first century.

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3. *Life Application Study Bible*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1988), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 1842-1843.