

Class Member Reading: Acts 10–14; 15:1–35

Act 10:1-15:35 NRSV

1 In Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian Cohort, as it was called. 2 He was a devout man who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God (Cornelius is presented both as an influential Roman/Gentile who would have been threatening to the Jews but is also an ideal “Godfearer”, a Gentile sympathetic toward Judaism and even participating, though not converted). 3 One afternoon at about three o’clock he had a vision in which he clearly saw an **angel of God** coming in and saying to him, “Cornelius.” (One of the best parts of this story, and why it is enjoyable in a literary level, is seeing how God brings different characters together and thus causes their views to change. Worth reflecting on: Does God manifest to people in all cultures? I think so. It is far too easy to be elitist and small minded when it comes to inspiration and even visions and miracles. I strongly suspect any theology that only allows true divine manifestations within a particular group) 4 He stared at him in terror and said, “What is it, Lord?” He answered, “Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. 5 Now send men to Joppa for a certain Simon who is called Peter; 6 he is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the seaside.” 7 When the angel who spoke to him had left, he called two of his slaves and a devout soldier from the ranks of those who served him, 8 and after telling them everything, he sent them to Joppa.

9 About noon the next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. 10 He became hungry and wanted something to eat; and while it was being prepared, he fell into a trance. 11 He saw the heaven opened and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. 12 In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air. 13 Then he heard a voice saying, “Get up, Peter; kill and eat.” 14 But Peter said, “**By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean.**” 15 The voice said to him again, a second time, “What God has made clean, you must not call profane.” 16 This happened three times, and the thing was suddenly taken up to heaven. (Really drive home how radical this would have been. This is worth significant discussion. Note that Peter at first rejects a direct invitation/command from God in preference of his cultural and religious norms!).

17 Now while Peter was **greatly puzzled** about what to make of the vision that he had seen (Such a great story about challenging assumptions and even shifting one’s world view), suddenly the men sent by Cornelius appeared. They were asking for Simon’s house and were standing by the gate. 18 They called out to ask whether Simon, who was called Peter, was staying there. 19 **While Peter was still thinking about the vision** (This is important—Peter is challenged and confused, but still wrestles with the issue), the Spirit said to him, “Look, three men are searching for you. 20 Now get up, go down, and go with them without hesitation; for I have sent them.” 21 So Peter went down to the men and said, “I am the one you are looking for; what is the reason for your coming?” 22 They answered, “Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is **well spoken of** by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say.” (Luke is making a very careful case that Cornelius is an ideal convert, to make the story go over as well as possible) 23 So Peter invited them in and gave them lodging.

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The next day he got up and went with them, and some of the believers from Joppa accompanied him. 24 The following day they came to Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. 25 On Peter's arrival Cornelius met him, and falling at his feet, worshiped him. 26 But Peter made him get up, saying, "Stand up; **I am only a mortal.**" (In pagan religions there are more degrees of divine beings) 27 And as he talked with him, he went in and found that many had assembled; 28 and he said to them, "You yourselves know that **it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile**; but **God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean.** 29 So when I was sent for, **I came without objection.** Now may I ask why you sent for me?" (Huge paradigm shift, but Peter transitions willingly and faithfully, though it takes several steps for him to do so)

30 Cornelius replied, "Four days ago at this very hour, at three o'clock, I was praying in my house when suddenly a man in dazzling clothes stood before me. 31 He said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. 32 Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon, who is called Peter; he is staying in the home of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.' 33 Therefore I sent for you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come. So now all of us are here in the presence of God to listen to all that the Lord has commanded you to say."

34 Then Peter began to speak to them: "I **truly understand** (and it is clear this has been a gradual and even challenging process) that **God shows no partiality**, 35 but **in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.** 36 You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, **preaching peace by Jesus Christ**—he is Lord of all. 37 That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: 38 how God **anointed Jesus of Nazareth** with the Holy Spirit and with power; **how he went about doing good** (What a wonderful summary; hopefully the same is true of us) and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. 39 We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; 40 but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, 41 not to all the people but to us who were **chosen by God as witnesses**, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. 42 He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that **he is the one ordained by God as judge** of the living and the dead. 43 All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

44 While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word (Yet another Pentacost experience, following the pattern of Acts—first the Jews receive the Holy Spirit in Acts 2, and then the Samaritans in Acts 8, and now the Gentiles in Acts 10). 45 The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were **astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles**, again, these spiritual manifestations and this transition challenges deeply held cultural beliefs. 46 for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, 47 "Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" 48 So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days.

Chapter 11

1 Now the apostles and the believers who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also accepted the word of God. 2 So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the **circumcised believers criticized him**, 3

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saying, “Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?” 4 Then Peter began to **explain it to them, step by step**, saying, 5 “I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. There was something like a large sheet coming down from heaven, being lowered by its four corners; and it came close to me. 6 As I looked at it closely I saw four-footed animals, beasts of prey, reptiles, and birds of the air. 7 I also heard a voice saying to me, ‘Get up, Peter; kill and eat.’ 8 But I replied, ‘By no means, Lord; for nothing profane or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’ 9 But a second time the voice answered from heaven, ‘**What God has made clean, you must not call profane.**’ 10 **This happened three times**; then everything was pulled up again to heaven. 11 At that very moment three men, sent to me from Caesarea, arrived at the house where we were. 12 The Spirit told me to go with them and not to make a distinction between them and us. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man’s house. 13 He told us how he had seen the angel standing in his house and saying, ‘Send to Joppa and bring Simon, who is called Peter; 14 he will give you a message by which you and your entire household will be saved.’ 15 And as I began to speak, the **Holy Spirit fell upon them** just as it had upon us at the beginning. 16 **And I remembered** the word of the Lord, how he had said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ 17 If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, **who was I that I could hinder God?**” 18 When they heard this, they were silenced. And they praised God, saying, “Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life.” [God is patient with Peter; Peter is patient with believers.](#)

19 Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that took place over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, and they spoke the word to no one except Jews. 20 But among them were some men of Cyprus and Cyrene who, on coming to Antioch, **spoke to the Hellenists** also, proclaiming the Lord Jesus. 21 The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number became believers and turned to the Lord. 22 **News of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem**, and they sent **Barnabas to Antioch** ([Antioch, along with Rome and Jerusalem, was a key center for earliest Christianity. It is near modern Antakya, Turkey \[southern point near the border of Syria\]](#)). 23 When he came and saw the grace of God, he rejoiced, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast devotion; 24 for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a **great many people were brought to the Lord**. 25 Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, 26 and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for an **entire year they met with the church and taught a great many people, and it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called “Christians.”**

27 At that **time prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch**. 28 One of them named Agabus stood up and predicted by the Spirit that there would be a severe famine over all the world; and this took place during the reign of Claudius. 29 The disciples determined that according to their ability, each would send relief to the believers living in Judea; 30 this they did, sending it to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

Chapter 12

1 About that time King Herod ([Herod Agrippa I, grandson of Herod the Great and father of the Agrippa who tries Paul later in Acts](#)) laid violent hands upon some who belonged to the church. 2 He had **James, the brother of John, killed with the sword**. 3 After he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. (This was during the festival of Unleavened Bread.) 4 When he had seized him, he put him in prison and handed him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him,

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intending to bring him out to the people after the Passover. 5 While Peter was kept in prison, the church prayed fervently to God for him.

6 The very night before Herod was going to bring him out, Peter, bound with two chains, was sleeping between two soldiers, while guards in front of the door were keeping watch over the prison. 7 Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He tapped Peter on the side and woke him, saying, "Get up quickly." And the chains fell off his wrists. 8 The angel said to him, "Fasten your belt and put on your sandals." He did so. Then he said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me." 9 Peter went out and followed him; he did not realize that what was happening with the angel's help was real; he thought he was seeing a vision. 10 After they had passed the first and the second guard, they came before the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord, and they went outside and walked along a lane, when suddenly the angel left him. 11 Then Peter came to himself and said, "Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hands of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting." (I think we need to question these miraculous accounts in the scriptures. Either God has such direction intervening power and chooses not to use it, or the scriptures are embellished. Not only does embellishing stories happen all the time, but revising our view of scriptures and miracles to a degree proves more theologically satisfying in my view than making God an arbitrary and fickle help to their children)

12 As soon as he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark (This is the traditional author of the Gospel of Mark, though there is no evidence this attribution is accurate), where many had gathered and were praying. 13 When he knocked at the outer gate, a maid named Rhoda came to answer. 14 On recognizing Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed that, instead of opening the gate, she ran in and announced that Peter was standing at the gate. 15 They said to her, "You are out of your mind!" But she insisted that it was so. They said, "It is his angel." 16 Meanwhile Peter continued knocking; and when they opened the gate, they saw him and were amazed. 17 He motioned to them with his hand to be silent, and described for them how the **Lord had brought him out of the prison**. And he added, "Tell this to **James** (James the brother of Jesus seems to have been the primary leader in Jerusalem) and to the believers." Then he left and went to another place. Though Luke emphasizes the unity and cooperation between Christian churches, and it is true that the disciples held important authority, we should imagine groups of house churches run by local leaders rather than a centralized Christian church. Paul's letters clearly demonstrate the tension and differences between groups of Christians.

18 When morning came, there was no small commotion among the soldiers over what had become of Peter. 19 When Herod had searched for him and could not find him, he examined the guards and ordered them to be put to death. Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there.

20 Now Herod was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon. So they came to him in a body; and after winning over Blastus, the king's chamberlain, they asked for a reconciliation, because their country depended on the king's country for food. 21 On an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat on the platform, and delivered a public address to them. 22 The people kept shouting, "The voice of a god, and not of a mortal!" 23 And immediately, because he had not given the glory to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died. (These are clearly legendary elements)

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24 But the word of God continued to advance and gain adherents ([Key theme of Acts](#)). 25 Then after completing their mission Barnabas and Saul returned to Jerusalem and brought with them John, whose other name was Mark.

Chapter 13

1 Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the ruler, and Saul. 2 While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “**Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul** for the work to which I have called them.” 3 Then after fasting and praying they **laid their hands on them** and sent them off.

4 So, being **sent out by the Holy Spirit**, they went down to Seleucia; and from there they sailed to Cyprus. 5 When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John also to assist them. 6 When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they met a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet, named Bar- Jesus. 7 He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and wanted to hear the word of God. 8 But the magician Elymas (for that is the translation of his name) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul away from the faith. 9 But Saul, also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him 10 and said, “You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord? 11 And now listen—the hand of the Lord is against you, and you will be blind for a while, unable to see the sun.” Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he went about groping for someone to lead him by the hand. 12 When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was astonished at the teaching about the Lord. ([Again, legendary details](#))

13 Then Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia. John, however, left them and returned to Jerusalem; 14 but they went on from Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia. And on the sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. 15 After the reading of the law and the prophets, the officials of the synagogue sent them a message, saying, “Brothers, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, give it.” 16 So Paul stood up and with a gesture began to speak:

“You Israelites, and others who fear God, listen. 17 The God of this people Israel chose our ancestors and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with uplifted arm he led them out of it. 18 For about forty years he put up with them in the wilderness. 19 After he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, he gave them their land as an inheritance 20 for about four hundred fifty years. After that he gave them judges until the time of the prophet Samuel. 21 Then they asked for a king; and God gave them Saul son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, who reigned for forty years. 22 When he had removed him, he made David their king. In his testimony about him he said, ‘I have found David, son of Jesse, to be a man after my heart, who will carry out all my wishes.’ 23 Of this man’s posterity God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised; 24 before his coming John had already proclaimed a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. 25 And as John was finishing his work, he said, ‘What do you suppose that I am? I am not he. No, but one is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of the sandals on his feet.’

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26 “My brothers, you descendants of Abraham’s family, and others who fear God, to us the message of this salvation has been sent. 27 Because the residents of Jerusalem and their leaders did not recognize him or understand the words of the prophets that are read every sabbath, they fulfilled those words by condemning him. 28 Even though they found no cause for a sentence of death, they asked Pilate to have him killed. 29 When they had carried out everything that was written about him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. 30 But God raised him from the dead; 31 and for many days he appeared to those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, and they are now **his witnesses** to the people. 32 And we bring you the good news that what God promised to our ancestors

33 he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising Jesus; as also it is written in the second psalm,

‘You are my Son;
today I have begotten you.’

34 As to his raising him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he has spoken in this way,

‘I will give you the holy promises made to David.’

35 Therefore he has also said in another psalm,

‘You will not let your Holy One experience corruption.’

36 For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, died, was laid beside his ancestors, and experienced corruption; 37 but he whom God raised up experienced no corruption. 38 Let it be known to you therefore, my brothers, that **through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you**; 39 by this Jesus everyone who believes is set free from all those sins from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses. 40 Beware, therefore, that what the prophets said does not happen to you:

41 ‘Look, you scoffers!
Be amazed and perish,
for in your days I am doing a work,
a work that you will never believe, even if someone tells you.’”

42 As Paul and Barnabas were going out, the people urged them to speak about these things again the next sabbath. 43 When the meeting of the synagogue broke up, **many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who spoke to them and urged them to continue in the grace of God.**

44 The next sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. 45 But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy; and blaspheming, they contradicted what was spoken by Paul. 46 Then both Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, “It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you reject it and judge yourselves to be unworthy of eternal life, we are now turning to the Gentiles. (This was the narrative Christians created because of the failure of the Jewish mission)

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47 For so the Lord has commanded us, saying,

‘I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles,
so that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’”

48 When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and praised the word of the Lord; and as many as had been destined for eternal life became believers (*Strange wording*). 49 **Thus the word of the Lord spread throughout the region.** 50 But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, and stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their region. 51 So they shook the dust off their feet in protest against them, and went to Iconium. 52 And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 14

1 The same thing occurred in Iconium, where Paul and Barnabas went into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a **great number of both Jews and Greeks became believers.** 2 But the **unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers** (*This becomes the standard explanatory trope*). 3 So they remained for a long time, **speaking boldly for the Lord, who testified to the word of his grace by granting signs and wonders to be done through them.** 4 But the residents of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, and some with the apostles. 5 And when an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them, 6 the apostles learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country; 7 and there they continued proclaiming the good news. *In this passage we can see key themes in Acts: The preaching of the gospel is powerful, many believe, but those who don't believe persecute the disciples and those who choose to follow them, but that the preaching of the gospel continues despite that persecution.*

8 In Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet and had never walked, for he had been crippled from birth. 9 He listened to Paul as he was speaking. And Paul, looking at him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed, 10 said in a loud voice, “Stand upright on your feet.” And the man sprang up and began to walk. 11 When the crowds saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, “The gods have come down to us in human form!” 12 Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. 13 The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates; he and the crowds wanted to offer sacrifice. 14 When the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting, 15 “Friends, why are you doing this? **We are mortals just like you,** and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these worthless things **to the living God,** who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. 16 In past generations he allowed all the nations to follow their own ways; 17 yet he has not left himself without a witness in doing good—giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, and filling you with food and your hearts with joy.” 18 Even with these words, they scarcely restrained the crowds from offering sacrifice to them. *Amusing, but also illustrates how we understand things within our cultural contexts.*

19 But **Jews came there from Antioch and Iconium and won over the crowds.** Then they **stoned Paul** and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. 20 But when the disciples surrounded him, he got up and went into the city. The next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe.

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21 After they had proclaimed the good news to that city and had **made many disciples**, they returned to Lystra, then on to Iconium and Antioch. 22 There they **strengthened the souls** of the disciples and **encouraged them to continue in the faith**, saying, “It is through many persecutions that we must enter the kingdom of God.” 23 And after they had **appointed elders for them in each church**, with prayer and fasting they entrusted them to the Lord in whom they had come to believe.

24 Then they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia. 25 When they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia. 26 From there they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had completed. 27 When they arrived, they called the church together and related all that God had done with them, and how he had **opened a door of faith for the Gentiles**. 28 And they stayed there with the disciples for some time.

Chapter 15

1 **Then certain individuals came down from Judea** and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are **circumcised** according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” 2 And after Paul and Barnabas had **no small dissension and debate with them**, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to **discuss this question with the apostles and the elders**. 3 So they were sent on their way by the church, and as they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, they reported the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the believers. 4 When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them. 5 But some believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees stood up and said, “It is necessary for them to be circumcised and ordered to keep the law of Moses.”

6 The apostles and the elders met together to consider this matter. 7 After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “My brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that I should be the one through whom the Gentiles would hear the message of the good news and become believers (Impossible to say if this is accurate. Paul is the only “apostle to the gentiles” we know of but that could be an accident of historical preservation). 8 And God, who knows the human heart, testified to them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us; 9 and in cleansing their hearts by faith he has made no distinction between them and us. 10 Now therefore why are you putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear? (Not historically accurate) 11 On the contrary, we believe that **we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.**”

12 The whole assembly kept silence, and listened to Barnabas and Paul as they told of all the signs and wonders that God had done through them among the Gentiles. 13 After they finished speaking, **James** replied, “My brothers, listen to me. 14 Simeon has related how God first looked favorably on

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the Gentiles, to take from among them a people for his name. 15 This agrees with the words of the prophets, as it is written,

16 ‘After this I will return,
and I will rebuild the dwelling of David, which has fallen;
from its ruins I will rebuild it,
and I will set it up,
17 so that all other peoples may seek the Lord—
even all the Gentiles over whom my name has been called.
Thus says the Lord, who has been making these things 18 known from long ago.’

19 Therefore I have reached the decision that **we should not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God**, 20 but we should write to them to abstain only from things polluted by idols and from fornication and from whatever has been strangled and from blood. 21 For in every city, for generations past, Moses has had those who proclaim him, for he has been read aloud every sabbath in the synagogues.”

22 Then the **apostles and the elders, with the consent of the whole church**, decided to choose men from among their members and to send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leaders among the brothers, 23 with the following letter: “The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the believers of Gentile origin in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings. 24 Since we have heard that certain persons who have **gone out from us**, though with no instructions from us, have said things to disturb you and have unsettled your minds, 25 we have decided unanimously to choose representatives and send them to you, along with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, 26 who have risked their lives for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. 27 We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. 28 For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to **impose on you no further burden than these essentials**: 29 that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication ([Sounds similar to the Noachic laws](#)). If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.”

30 So they were sent off and went down to Antioch. When they gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter. 31 When its members read it, they rejoiced at the exhortation. 32 Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the believers. 33 After they had been there for some time, they were sent off in peace by the believers to those who had sent them. 35 But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, and there, with many others, they taught and proclaimed the word of the Lord

Additional Reading: Bible Dictionary, “[Circumcision](#),” 646; “[Cornelius](#),” 650

Circumcision

The token of the Abrahamic covenant during Old Testament dispensations. Those who received it thenceforth enjoyed the privileges and undertook the responsibilities of the covenant. It symbolized some aspects of separation or dedication (1) to God, to whom Israel belonged; (2) from the world, the uncircumcised with whom Israel might not mix; (3) from sin ([Deut. 10:16](#); [30:6](#); [Jer. 4:4](#); [9:25–26](#); [Ezek. 44:7](#)).

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The subjects of circumcision were (1) male Israelites, properly when eight days old ([Gen. 17:12](#)), but sometimes at a later age ([Ex. 4:25](#); [Josh. 5:2–9](#)); (2) slaves born in the house or bought with money ([Gen. 17:13](#)); (3) strangers who wished to eat the Passover ([Ex. 12:48](#)).

Circumcision was not peculiar to Israel. It was practiced in Egypt and also by nations with whom Israel had not come in contact. The significance of circumcision was that it was the manifest token of the covenant that the Lord had made with Abraham and his seed. It does not matter that other nations also practiced circumcision for to them it did not have the same meaning or purpose. The various Canaanite tribes appear to have been uncircumcised ([Gen. 34:14–17](#); [Judg. 14:3](#); [1 Sam. 31:4](#); [2 Sam. 1:20](#)).

With circumcision was connected the giving of a name; but there is no express mention of this custom until New Testament times ([Luke 1:59](#); [2:21](#)). It would follow naturally from the fact that Abram's name was changed at the institution of the ordinance ([Gen. 17:5, 10–14](#)).

There was much controversy in the early church with regard to the obligation of circumcision ([Acts 15:1–31](#)). The Church under direction of Peter and the Twelve, and acting under the guidance of the Spirit, declared that circumcision was not obligatory for gentile converts. However, it apparently did not settle the matter of whether or not Jewish members of the Church should have their children circumcised. As one reads the scriptures on the matter, it becomes evident that the real issue was not circumcision only but also the larger question as to continued observance of the law of Moses by members of the Church. The word *circumcision* seems to have been representative of the law in these instances. The controversy was renewed later on in Galatia, as we read in [Gal. 2:1–15](#); [5:2–6, 11](#); [6:12–16](#). These passages, along with [Rom. 2:25–29](#); [3:1–2](#); [Philip. 3:3](#); and [Col. 2:11](#), contain Paul's teaching on the subject.

The Jewish part of the church membership, especially in Jerusalem, appears to have been very reluctant to cease from the rituals and ceremony of the law of Moses ([Acts 21:17–25](#)). This is a marked contrast to the Church among the Nephites, in which there seems to have been a cessation of the law immediately upon their awareness of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. ([3 Ne. 15:1–4](#); [Moro. 8:8](#)). See also [Abraham, covenant of](#); [Law of Moses](#); [Proselytes](#).

Cornelius

A centurion at Caesarea, baptized by Peter ([Acts 10](#)). The significance of Cornelius's baptism is that he was probably the first Gentile to come into the Church not having previously become a proselyte to Judaism (see [Proselytes](#)). Other Gentiles had joined the Church, but they had been converted to Judaism before becoming Christians, which caused no great commotion among Jewish Christians who thought of Christianity as having some ties with Judaism.

Preceding the baptism of Cornelius, there were several spiritual manifestations: the ministry of an angel to Cornelius; a vision to Peter showing that the dietary restrictions of the law of Moses were to be discontinued; the voice of the Spirit to Peter; and a manifestation of the power of the Holy Ghost, accompanied by the speaking in tongues. All of this would make clear the divine approval and direction of what was about to take place.

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Lesson 30: God is No Respector of Persons

The baptism of Cornelius and his family marked a new dimension in the work of the Church in New Testament times, since it opened the way for the gospel to be preached to the Gentiles directly, without going by way of Judaism. It is notable that this major event in the missionary activity of the Church was done through the ministry of Peter, the chief Apostle, who held the keys of the kingdom of God at that time on the earth.

Scripture Chain: **Acts 10:34–35; Acts 15:7–11; Romans 2:9–11; 2 Nephi 26:33**

Acts 10:34-35 NRSV

34 Then Peter began to speak to them: “**I truly understand that God shows no partiality**, 35 but in every nation anyone who fears him and **does what is right** is acceptable to him

Acts 15:7-11 NRSV

7 After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “My brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that I should be the one through whom the Gentiles would hear the message of the good news and become believers. 8 And God, who knows the human heart, **testified to them by giving them the Holy Spirit**, just as he did to us; 9 and in **cleansing their hearts by faith he has made no distinction between them and us**. **Powerful wording—made no distinction between them and us**. 10 Now therefore why are you putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear? 11 On the contrary, we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will

Romans 2:9-11 NRSV

9 There will be anguish and distress for everyone who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, 10 but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. 11 For God shows no partiality

2 Ne. 26:33

33 For none of these iniquities come of the Lord; for **he doeth that which is good** among the children of men; and he doeth nothing save it be plain unto the children of men; and he **inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness**; and **he denieth none** that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and **all are alike unto God**, both Jew and Gentile.