



## THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

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### LESSON 11 – STUDY QUESTIONS ACTS 11:1-12:25

#### DAY ONE

1. Choose a question from Father McBride’s commentary that you enjoyed thinking about. Explain why you connected with it.

#### Read Acts 11:1-10

2. As Lesson 11 begins, we read that news of the work of the Holy Spirit among the Gentiles had reached the apostles and believers (the Jewish Christians) who were in Judea. How was Peter greeted by these circumcised believers when he went up to Jerusalem and what did they ask him (verses 2-3)?

**NOTE:** The Jewish people traditionally followed rules derived from the Law of Moses. These rules and other Rabbinic interpretations of them made the Jews believe that they should not associate with Gentiles or enter their houses.

3. To further understand why the circumcised believers were so concerned, read and record these verses:

Genesis 17:10

Leviticus 11:46-47

4. To help the Jewish Christians understand how important this change would be and that it was truly a message from above, Peter recounts every miraculous detail of what happened to him in Joppa (verses 3-8). In verses 9 and 10 he concludes his account. Record God's words to him from verse 9.

5a. While the Jewish people found it difficult to accept the Gentile converts, throughout the Old Testament God promised that He would reach out to peoples of *all nations*. Record here the phrases from the following Scripture passages that refer to this promise.

Genesis 12:3

Psalm 22:27

Zechariah 2:11

b. Peter and the apostles were following Jesus' example by reaching out to Gentiles. Note and record one of these examples from the New Testament of scripture by which Jesus taught inclusiveness and put aside the old ways:

Romans 14:17-18

1 Timothy 4:4-5

6. CONNECTION: Through the baptism of Cornelius we saw the fulfillment of the beautiful promise God made to Abraham that “all nations will be blessed through you.” This was a big change for the Jewish Christians, who were still among God’s “Chosen People”, Israel. Peter took great pains to explain that the Holy Spirit had brought about these changes in accordance with God’s longtime plan. This was a dramatic change for the Jewish Christians! Change can be disconcerting or frightening. Consider how you respond to new things that challenge your beliefs or practices and give an example of one such change and how it has affected you.

Read and record Joshua 1:9 and pray that you will not be afraid of change. Let that thought lead you into prayer.

**DAY TWO**  
**Read Acts 11:11-18**

7a. In this passage, Peter continued to retell to the apostles and to the believers the events we read about in chapter 10. For what reason(s) do you think Luke would tell this same story twice in such detail?

b. In verse 10, speaking of the end of his trance, Peter recalled the moment when "everything was pulled up to heaven." To what do you think that description refers? See Acts 11:5-6.

8. Read and record the important direction given to Peter by the Holy Spirit in the first part of verse 12.

9. Peter continued to describe his journey to the home of Cornelius in verses 12 and 13. In verse 14, Peter neared the end of this story with the words of the angel sent to Cornelius. "He will give you a message." What spectacular promise is connected with this message?

10a. What did Peter relate to the Jewish believers of Jerusalem according to verse 15?

b. To what event do you think the words "just as it had upon us at the beginning" refer and why do you think this would be important to the believers?

11. Peter turned his thoughts back to the words of Jesus Christ about how John baptized with water "but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." He concluded with a mighty argument which silenced the Jewish Christians and brought them to acceptance of Peter's acts. Read and record Peter's words in verse 17.

12. CONNECTION: Ages before the event described in today's lesson, Isaiah spoke of the gifts of the Holy Spirit...the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord (Isaiah 11:2). The gifts of the Holy Spirit were given to the disciples on Pentecost and (as Peter related in today's lesson) in the same way to the Gentiles at Caesarea. When we, too, receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit, they are seen in the fruit that is produced in our lives. Record the fruits of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) and consider which of these you see increasing in you as you grow in faith and the knowledge of God. Record some details here about the positive changes you have seen in your life!

Read Colossians 1:9-10 and let thoughts of growing in the Lord lead you into prayer.

### **DAY THREE**

#### **Read Acts 11:19-30**

13a. As today's passage opens, we are reminded that the believers (who had been forced to flee Jerusalem because of the persecution after the martyrdom of Stephen) had traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch. What was their approach to spreading God's word (verse 19)?

b. In verse 20, we see that some men of Cyprus and Cyrene changed this approach and also spoke to non-Jews. Briefly summarize what they did upon coming to Antioch and what was the result according to verse 21?

**NOTE: Antioch was a great Greek-speaking city in Syria, and one of the largest cities of the world at that time, next to Rome and Alexandria. The Hellenists in this passage were Greeks that were not Jewish. Much of the Mediterranean world was Greek at one time because of the conquests of Alexander the Great in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.**

14a. News of this came to the Church in Jerusalem, and so Barnabas was sent to Antioch to verify the truth (verse 22). What do you remember about Barnabas? (Refer back to Acts 4:36-37 and Acts 9:26-27.)

b. We learn in verse 23 that Barnabas rejoiced over the grace of God's work in Antioch among the Greeks and encouraged them to remain faithful. What more do we learn about him as a person and about God's work in Antioch from verse 24 of today's passage?

15. Barnabas went to Tarsus to find Saul (verse 25) and to bring him to Antioch to help in the mission. What happened after Barnabas brought Saul to Antioch (first part of verse 26)?

16. Because this is the first group of converts that were not Jewish, they were given a special name. Record the new name noted at the end of verse 26.

17a. In verse 27, we are told that prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. These are Christians who had received the gift of prophecy. Who is the prophet we meet in verse 28 and what is his message?

b. What was the reaction of the disciples to news of the famine (verses 29 and 30)?

18. **CONNECTION:** When Barnabas arrived in Antioch, he was overjoyed at what he saw. God's grace was clearly being manifested in the lives of those new Christians. Rejoicing, he went to get Saul, to tell him what he had seen and to bring him back to help him convert the Greeks. Think of a time when you, like Barnabas, witnessed God's grace working in your life or the life of someone you love. Briefly describe the joy you felt at recognizing the grace of God's Spirit at work in this situation and your reaction or actions.

Read and record Romans 14:17 and let thoughts of God's outpouring of grace lead you into prayer.

**NOTE:** When word went out that Hellenist converts were coming into Antioch, the Church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to ascertain that the authentic Gospel was being preached. Conversely, when the Antioch church heard that Jerusalem was in famine, money was sent back to Jerusalem from Antioch to help those in need. This kind of relationship still exists between Rome and the Church all over the world. The **Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith** in Rome oversees the authenticity of the faith. Through ministries such as Aid to the Church in Need, wealthier dioceses send money to poorer dioceses so that the faith can continue to be taught. From India, to Syria, to Bosnia, to Darfur, the Catholic Church blesses the communities in which it exists.

#### **DAY FOUR**

##### **Read Acts 12:1-10**

19a. As today's passage begins, we learn that King Herod Agrippa attacked some of the believers, including James, the brother of John (the sons of Zebedee, whom Jesus called "the sons of thunder" (Mark 3:17)). Herod had James killed. Read Mark 10:39 and record what Jesus prophesized about their deaths.

b. Because the killing of James pleased the Jews, Herod also arrested Peter (verse 3). Peter was arrested during the feast of Unleavened Bread (Passover). Who else had previously been arrested during that sacred time?

**NOTE:** Herod Agrippa (10 BC – 44 AD, king of Judea 41-44 AD and grandson of Herod the Great) launched a wave of persecution against the Christians hierarchy.

20a. According to verse 4, what special efforts did Herod extend to guard Peter, and what were his intentions?

b. What did the Church do when they heard of Peter's arrest and imprisonment (verse 5)?

21. In verse 6, we learn of several unusual things that happened on the very night before Herod was going to bring Peter out to execute him. Complete the following descriptions from verses 6-8:

Peter, bound with two chains, was sleeping between two soldiers ...

Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell ...

The angel said to him "Fasten your belt and put on your sandals" He did so. Then ...

22a. Peter obeyed the angel's instructions and followed him out, but he didn't realize that what was happening, with the angel's help, was real. What did Peter think according to verse 9?

b. Peter and the angel passed by the first and second guard, and then came to an iron gate leading into the city which opened of its own accord. What happened next according to verse 10?

23. The famine, the persecution, Peter's imprisonment and miraculous escape from a dark prison resembled in some ways the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt. The word "exodus" has also been used to describe Jesus' passion and death and resurrection. What wondrous thing is consistent in all of these events?

24. CONNECTION: Like Peter, we have all been in a situation where we desperately needed God's help. Guarded by 4 squads of soldiers and bound by two chains, Peter knew there was nothing he could do about his situation. Amazingly, he was content to simply go to sleep and let God take care of him, and indeed, God sent an angel to help him. How about you? Is your faith as strong as Peter's? Has there been a circumstance in your life when you were feeling totally helpless, you put your trust in God and received special care or unseen aid from Him? If you are comfortable in doing so, briefly describe this special "gift from above" for your small group.

Read and Record: Psalm 91:11 and write a prayer today beginning, "Dear God, I trust in You". Let these thoughts lead you into prayer.

**DAY FIVE**  
**Read Acts 12:11-17**

25a. As we saw yesterday, Peter thought his escape was a dream or a vision. Once the angel left him outside the city, he realized that he was free. According to verse 11, what did he say to himself?

b. What were the Jewish people of Jerusalem expecting?

26. According to verse 12, to whose house did Peter go and what was happening there?

27a. According to verse 13, who answered Peter's knock?

b. Luke paints a humorous word picture for us in verse 14. In your own words, describe what you "see".

28a. Rhoda tried to convince those gathered that Peter was at the door, but they thought that she was out of her mind, and thought she was seeing Peter's angel (verse 15). In the meantime, what was Peter doing and what happened, according to verse 16?

b. Those believers who had gathered at the house of Mary (the mother of John-Mark) were amazed to see Peter, but he motioned to them with his hand to be silent, and described for them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. What were Peter's final words to them before he left and went to another place (verse 17)?

29. CONNECTION: At Mary's home we found a group of Christians gathered together to pray in unity for Peter, their leader, who was in danger. As they prayed, their prayer was literally being answered, but they did not believe it. Were they not expecting to be heard? Consider your own prayers. At times we all are "just going through the motions" - not really expecting a miracle or for God to answer our prayers. At other times we pray with faith and confidence, seeking God's will and anticipating His loving response. Think of what we can learn from today's lesson about the power of prayer and of one instance in which you are sure that your prayer was answered!

Read and record a phrase from Philippians 4:6-7 that is most meaningful to you and begin your prayer today with thanksgiving for God's great generosity.

**DAY SIX**

**Read Acts 12:18-25**

30. As today's lesson begins, how does verse 18 describe what happened "when morning came"?

31a. According to Roman law, guards who let a prisoner escape were given the same sentence as the escapee would have received. Record what Herod did after he had searched for Peter and could not find him (first sentence of verse 19).

b. The last sentence of verse 19 refers to Peter's actions. Where did Peter go after he left Antioch?

32a. For some reason Luke then recounted Herod's anger with the people of Tyre and Sidon, who joined together and sought an audience with Herod. What are the things the people did in response to this anger, according to verse 20?

b. Once again, Luke paints a vivid picture of Herod, describing him as "putting on his royal robes, and taking his seat on a platform and delivering a public address". In response to his glorious appearance, the people kept shouting "the voice of a god and not of a mortal." What do you think they meant by this (verses 21-22)?

33. So much for blasphemous flattery! What immediately happened to Herod despite the pomp and glory of his earthly throne (and why), according to 23?

**NOTE: Knowledge of medical conditions at that time was limited. "Worms" could mean anything that had to do with abdominal pain or intestinal distress. To be "eaten by worms" was considered to be the most disgraceful of deaths.**

34. Verse 24 transitions from Herod back to the story of the growth of the early Church. What was going on with the church and the work of the disciples?

35. What information does verse 25 give us about Saul and Barnabas?

**THINK:** History holds that John Mark, who we met in Acts 12:12, was a relative of Barnabas. We met Barnabas in Acts 4:36. Authorship of the Gospel of Mark is attributed to him. Do you think Peter's miraculous escape could have inspired him to return with Barnabas and Saul to Jerusalem, and thereafter follow Peter?

36. CONNECTION: In today's passage, we saw Herod Agrippa believe the flattery of the crowd from Tyre and Sidon and fail to give glory to God. Flattery is an interesting thing. It can inflate our sense of self and allow us to take too much credit for the blessings that we receive. Flattery can cause us to think and act in ways that are contrary to God's teaching and assume too much pride in ourselves. As people of God, we need to keep our balance - being thankful for the gifts we have and using them while staying humble. We must remember that whatever we achieve is by God's grace. How do you keep balance in your life? How do you both recognize your gifts and give the glory to God?

Read and record 1 Corinthians 10:30. Let these thoughts lead you into prayer.

After completing this lesson, read Chapters 11 and 12 (refer to pages 79–87 in the edition copyrighted in 1992 by Our Sunday Visitor or pages 81-93 in the edition reprinted in 2013 by Saint Benedict Press) in the *Meditation and Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* by Alfred McBride, O. Praem. The Cornerstone Catholic Scripture Study acknowledges that scripture quotations in this study are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible: Copyright © 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

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