

# THE CALL OF THE GENTILES

BIBLE TEXT : Acts 11:1-26.

LESSON 304 Senior Course

**MEMORY VERSE:** "I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved" (Romans 9:25).

## BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

### **Acts 11:1-26**

<sup>1</sup> And the apostles and brethren that were in Judaea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God.

<sup>2</sup> And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him,

<sup>3</sup> Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them.

<sup>4</sup> But Peter rehearsed *the matter* from the beginning, and expounded *it* by order unto them, saying,

<sup>5</sup> I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me: <sup>6</sup> Upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.

<sup>7</sup> And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay and eat.

<sup>8</sup> But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth.

<sup>9</sup> But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, *that* call not thou common.

<sup>10</sup> And this was done three times: and all were drawn up again into heaven.

<sup>11</sup> And, behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent

## BIBLE REFERENCES:

### **I Contending for the Truth**

1. The zealous brethren in Judaea contended with Peter because he ate with Gentiles, Acts 11:1-3.
2. Peter rehearsed the whole matter of his visit to Cornelius' house, Acts 11:4-10.
3. The Spirit of God had bidden Peter to go with Cornelius' messengers, Acts 11:11, 12.
4. God worked through Peter's sermon, for the Holy Ghost fell upon the Gentiles, Acts 11:13-16.
5. The Jewish brethren held their peace and glorified God as Peter concluded his defence, Acts 11:17, 18.

### **II The Expanding Church**

1. Persecution scattered the brethren abroad into many places, Acts 11:19.
2. The story of the Lord Jesus burned in the hearts of His disciples and was told in every city where they came, Acts 11:20, 21.

### **III The Revival in Antioch**

1. The Word of the Lord had special effect in Antioch, so the church at Jerusalem sent Barnabas to help them, Acts 11:22.
2. Barnabas recognized the workings of God and encouraged the people to cleave to the Lord, Acts 11:23, 24.
3. The Lord gave Barnabas good success, and Barnabas went to Tarsus to find Saul, Acts 11:25, 26.
4. The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch, Acts 11:26

## NOTES:

### **Open Door**

Peter opened his sermon to the people in Cornelius' house by stating a fact that had impressed itself indelibly in Peter's heart: "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34). This fact had always been true, for from the beginning God had said, "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?" (Genesis 4:7). However, because of Jewish teachings, traditions, and prejudices, Peter had not realized the universal application of this truth before this day.

In its first appearance, the Church seemed only a Jewish sect; but through the calling of Cornelius and his household, God instituted a great change and showed His will to include the Gentile people into His plan of redemption. The Apostles and disciples had felt that only Israelites, and those Gentiles who came under the influence of the Mosaic Law, were eligible for the worship of God; but now the door of faith was open to everyone who would enter. The restrictions of the Mosaic institution were at an end; and in Christ Jesus there was to be "neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free" (Colossians 3:11).

Considering the magnitude of the change and the difficulties of long established custom and training that had to be overcome in

from Caesarea unto me.

<sup>12</sup> And the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man's house:

<sup>13</sup> And he shewed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter;

<sup>14</sup> Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved.

<sup>15</sup> And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning.

<sup>16</sup> Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost.

<sup>17</sup> Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as *he did* unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?

<sup>18</sup> When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.

<sup>19</sup> Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only.

<sup>20</sup> And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus.

<sup>21</sup> And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.

<sup>22</sup> Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they

the Church itself, the reason can be clearly seen why God opened the way with such an abundance of miraculous happenings. The visit of the angel to Cornelius with instructions to send for Peter; and, in addition, God's vision and counsel to Peter on the housetop which concluded with the words: "Go with them, doubting nothing"; together with the descent of the Holy Ghost upon all the people assembled in Cornelius' house, convinced Peter and the brethren who accompanied him to Caesarea that this was the Lord's doings. They rejoiced with these people that God had opened the door of the Church to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews.

### **Progressive Gospel**

When Peter returned from Caesarea to Jerusalem, he found there many zealous disciples who contended with him for going into Cornelius' house and eating with the Gentiles. Such an act was unthinkable to the Jerusalem Christians, for it transgressed their recognized code of ethics; but Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning and expanded it to them. Peter ended his defence with the words, "What was I, that I could withstand God?" When they heard these words the disciples no longer questioned. They held their peace and glorified God, saying, "Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life." These were true disciples, for they willingly gave up their conflicting opinions when the will of God was shown to them.

Some people dislike progress, especially religious progress. While the church carries on in the same old pattern of the past, all is well; but when progressive plans to further the Gospel are instituted and carried out this type of people quickly censures the methods being inaugurated. "The church is not as it used to be," some will say; and others, "A grave mistake is being made"; or, "This has never been done before." God is the Founder of the Church. Let Him make the changes in church policy that are necessary. Our part is to be stalwart Christians to the point that we can recognize and carry out 'God's ordained plans.

God does not change, nor does His plan of salvation; but the ways and means that God uses to reach the hearts of sinful men sometimes do change. The man or woman who sets his heart against the changes that God institutes will find himself ill at ease in the very place where once he felt the finest fellowship. No one can stop growing in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and at the same time keep in step with Christ's progressive Church. The unprogressive church is not Christ's Church.

### **Originality**

While some men are against a progressive program in the church, other men seem eager to be always original — never wanting to follow in another's footsteps. There is great danger of being too radical in either direction. The man will often seem to be original, however, who faithfully carries out the perfect will of God. God will inspire His children to thoughts and actions that could never have been their own; but how careful must the Christian be in these matters to be sure that they are of God. All inspiration that comes from God agrees with the Word of God. Peter did not act on a solitary thought. God made His will clear through a series of demonstrations and inspirations until Peter was sure of God's intended meaning. Even the dissenters agreed with Peter when they heard his explanation.

Whenever God leads an individual out into a new work or a new field, He always makes the matter unmistakably clear. Every soul should wait upon the Lord with much prayer and be sure of

sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch.

<sup>23</sup> Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.

<sup>24</sup> For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord.

<sup>25</sup> Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul:

<sup>26</sup> And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.

His call to a specific duty or work. Much damage has been done to the cause of Christ by those who tried to anticipate God's will and command, following a tangent rather than the line of God's true plan. God will call more than once, if it is necessary, as He did to Samuel. Moreover, God's people will recognize the genuine call of God. Not much confidence can be placed in the call that cannot be recognized except by the individual who received it; but when the call is clear, unmistakable, and recognized by other spiritual persons, let it be pursued to its utmost bounds regardless of persecution or opposition.

#### **At Antioch**

When the Apostles and disciples of Jesus realized that the door of the Gospel was opened fully to the Gentiles, the message was directed to them as well as to the Jews. The whole of mankind was seen to stand in the favoured position as eligible recipients of salvation. Persecution had driven the disciples in many directions, but it could not tear the love of Jesus and the hope of the resurrection out of their hearts. The story of the Gospel burned on their lips in every community they entered. The direct admission of the Gentiles into the Church made their labours much lighter and their endeavours much farther reaching. In many instances the Gentiles gladly received the Gospel.

The acceptance of the Gospel by the people of Antioch was such an instance. Several disciples from the regions of Cyprus and Cyrene entered this city and started preaching to the Grecians about Jesus. Many believed and turned to the Lord, and word of the revival found its way to the Church at Jerusalem. The Apostles sent forth Barnabas to help in the work. Possibly the Apostles were a little uncertain as to the genuineness of the Antiochian movement, because the disciples who preached there seemed to be little known. Their names are not recorded in this account, but Barnabas found the disciples were true and the revival was sincere. The grace of God was manifest among the people, and Barnabas was glad. His inspired preaching continued to stir the hearts of the Antiochians, with the result that many people were added to the Lord.

Sometimes God's people are declared to be narrow-minded and intolerant because they will not fellowship "every wind of doctrine." There is a movement abroad in the world to unite all churches into one group; but the Word of God warns: "Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (I John 4:1). True Christianity needs no movements nor legislation toward uniting, because true Christians enjoy spontaneous unity and fellowship whenever and wherever they meet. Barnabas needed only to see the grace of God manifested in the hearts of the people of Antioch to make him joyful. No amount of fair speech, or talk of revival, or planned co-operation of religious activities in and around Antioch could have gladdened the heart of the preacher from Jerusalem as did the grace of God manifested in their hearts. So extensive was the revival that Barnabas went to Tarsus to find Saul and bring him to Antioch. Together they laboured in this vineyard of the Lord for a whole year, seeing much Christian fruit brought forth for God.

#### **Christians**

There was a "new thing under the sun" in Antioch. To the astonished citizens of that city appeared a few Jews, fugitives from Jerusalem, who had a heart-warming story to tell. The heathen Greeks of the city heard for the first time about Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who lived, died, and arose again. Many of

### **QUESTIONS**

1. Why did the disciples at Jerusalem contend with Peter?
2. How did Peter answer their criticism?
3. What four things convinced Peter that God sent him to Cornelius?
4. What was the effect upon the Church when the Holy Ghost fell upon the Gentiles?
5. What great force scattered the disciples into all parts of the then known world?
6. Who preached to the people of Antioch?
7. How did their preaching differ from the preaching of the other disciples?
8. Who was sent from Jerusalem to help in the revival at Antioch?
9. What was the name given to the disciples of Jesus by the people of Antioch?

the Greeks believed the story and put it to the test in their own lives. They prayed to the Lord, called upon Him for mercy, repented of their sins, and forsook their former mode of living. The Lord heard their prayers, washed their hearts in His Blood, and gave them power to live above sin: "old things . . . passed away; behold, all things . . . become new" (II Corinthians 5:17).

The citizens of Antioch did not know what to think of this group of new men. The Jews contemptuously called Jesus' disciples "Nazarenes" or "Galilæans" with all the scorn that voice could convey; but these people were Gentiles and far from the scenes of Jesus' ministry. Some new name had to be invented, but the Antiochians were equal to the task, for they were noted for their wit and their inclination to confer nicknames. These new men were follower of Jesus Christ — men of Christ — so Christian became their name. Given perhaps in contempt by sarcastic men, the name **Christian** has since been turned into the designation by which, all over the world, the followers of Jesus Christ have been proud to call themselves.

### **Revival at Any Cost**

These chapters in God's Word, telling of the enlargement of God's loving call to include the hearts of all men, should inspire every true Christian to pray for a tremendous revival to spread throughout the earth. "The faith which was once delivered unto the saints" sent those saints into every part of the known world with a fervent prayer in their hearts for all mankind and a burning story of redemption on their lips. They spoke their message with authority and boldness, and revivals were the inevitable result.

Cornelius witnessed a revival. Why? The angel of God said, "Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God" (Acts 10:4). Cornelius was found praying and fasting at the ninth hour of the day — three o'clock in the afternoon. Most men would be about their business or pleasure, minding their duties or their hobbies, dinning or relaxing — anything but earnestly praying to God at three o'clock in the afternoon. The cause of Christ should have first call in the life of every man who calls himself a Christian; but how far short most of us fall in God's expectations of us. Consider the amount of time and material that most men willingly spend on themselves in contrast to the little they will spend for God. Consider the multitudes of souls going into a lost eternity because somebody failed to expend himself and witness for Christ. The Church will never see an extensive revival except as she is willing to pay the price for it.

God desires to rule and reign in the heart of men. The late hour of the world's day demands that men pray always, as did Cornelius — not mindful of personal sacrifice — to gain a greater fellowship and knowledge of God in order to tell it to the world. God's soldier who is prevailing in prayer is marching swiftly toward Heaven on God's royal highway of holiness. He will not journey thus alone; but others, noting his conquering tread, will fall in step and march along with him.