



NG Study Guide: Acts 11:1-18 “Spirit-Empowered Testimony” [11.27.22]

Love God + know the Bible better:

1. Read the passage cited above and try to answer the questions below before your group meets.
2. *Leader note: Please review the brief instructions for leaders at the bottom.*

The Study

Thesis: The gospel is playing out in each of our lives in truly amazing ways. We are given the opportunity to be witnesses to what God is doing in our lives which encourages those around us with the truth of the gospel and the saving work of Christ.

Subject: Peter’s testimony from Caesarea

Object: Share the gospel through testimony

1. Gospel above tradition [1-3]

Now the apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. ² And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him, ³ saying, “You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!”

Peter left Caesarea and went to Jerusalem [1]. We aren’t told exactly how much time has transpired from when the Holy Spirit fell on the Gentiles who were listening [10:44] and when Peter arrived Jerusalem. We do know that the news of this event has already made it to Jerusalem.

When Peter arrives he is rebuked by those of the circumcision [2]. This is a group of Jewish believers who were trying to impose and uphold Jewish tradition in addition to the Gospel of Jesus as a sign of full or true commitment to God. They tried to impose circumcision on Gentiles who placed their faith in Jesus, and tried to continue to enforce the laws of the Old Covenant (continued adherence to the Levitical laws), even though Jesus came to offer the New Covenant.

And they ‘contended’ or rebuked Peter by saying, “You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!” [2-3]. So their frustration presently was with Peter inter-mingling in the home of a Gentile and eating with them. According to Jewish tradition (not the Law of Moses, but Jewish tradition) this very act would defile a Jewish person. It was against their customs. The reasoning was because of the gentile traditions and what they ate which did not observe the Levitical rules regarding food. There is a challenge here because according to Jewish tradition this act of defiance with their customs would have required ceremonial cleansing. Therefore, Jews did not enter Gentile homes, and Gentiles did not enter Jewish homes. However, Peter enters into Cornelius’ home and he dines with them. This was something that Jesus was accused of on a regular basis as well (Lk. 5:30, 15:2, 19:7). Jesus set the standard that His grace was not just for Jews, but for whoever placed their faith in Him.

This is what is called legalism. Legalism is when we add things to the Gospel that Jesus didn’t add himself. We are not supposed to add things that get in the way of others coming to faith or growing in their faith that is not in accordance with Scripture.

In this instance the Jewish believers wanted the Gentiles to adhere with their traditions of what they eat and to become circumcised in order to demonstrate that they are part of the team, but this wasn’t a requirement that God had placed on the gentiles.

Often times we as Christians want others to begin to behave or conduct themselves in a way that we feel comfortable with according to our traditions. We want them to act like us, we want them to dress like us, we want them to talk like us, and worship like us prior to feeling comfortable with accepting them as part of us. It is essential for our beliefs to be rooted in God's Word, it's essential for our beliefs to be rooted in the Gospel. It is essential for us to constantly be evaluating whether or not our traditions and what makes us comfortable and uncomfortable are in any way a hinderance to the work of the Gospel and the moving of the Holy Spirit.

2. Gospel Presentation [4-17]

a. Personal testimony [4-12]

4 But Peter explained it to them in order from the beginning, saying: ⁵ "I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, an object descending like a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came to me. ⁶ When I observed it intently and considered, I saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. ⁷ And I heard a voice saying to me, 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat.' ⁸ But I said, 'Not so, Lord! For nothing common or unclean has at any time entered my mouth.' ⁹ But the voice answered me again from heaven, 'What God has cleansed you must not call common.' ¹⁰ Now this was done three times, and all were drawn up again into heaven. ¹¹ At that very moment, three men stood before the house where I was, having been sent to me from Caesarea. ¹² Then the Spirit told me to go with them, doubting nothing. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered the man's house.

Peter begins his response by sharing *his* testimony. If you look back at the account in chapter 10 you'll notice that it starts with Cornelius' encounter with the angel. Peter had heard of what God was doing in Cornelius' life, but his response is *his own* testimony. He shares that he was in Joppa praying, when he saw a vision [5]. And he continues to give this account of what *he experienced*. He tells these Jewish believers that *he* saw a vision of a sheet coming down with animals on it [6-7]. And *he* states that *he* heard a voice, which if you have a red letter Bible you'll notice is the voice of Jesus telling him to kill and eat [7]. And his response is that he's been a good Jew, and shouldn't be eating those things which had previously been forbidden for Jews to eat according to Levitical law [8]. Then we see a direct quote repeated from 10:15 stating, "what God has cleansed you must not call common" [9]. This happens a third time and then Peter awakens from his vision [10]. The old covenant definitions of purity and holiness have been changed by the saving work of Christ. The old laws that were in place to ensure that God's people were distinctly living for Him, have now shifted due to the holiness that is bestowed on God's people only by grace because of the work of Christ allows Jews and Gentiles to live under their new primary identity as a united people rather than distinct people. Peter has been told that they are now able to share homes, a table, and meals together.

He then goes on to share that when *he* awoke, there were 3 men from Caesarea asking him to go and share the gospel with Cornelius [11]. This is a picture of God working in His perfect timing. Then the Spirit told him to go with them [12].

What Peter has done here is shared his testimony with these Jewish believers. He's told a story of what God has done in his life. We have to zoom out and remember that the thesis verse for the book of Acts is 1:8 "And you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Peter is living this out. He is being a witness. The definition of witness as a noun is "to attest to a fact or event" and as a verb is "to testify" or to bear witness. Peter's testimony is that he has observed something, he experienced something, and now he is testifying or sharing that experience with others.

b. Gospel message [13-17]

13 And he told us how he had seen an angel standing in his house, who said to him, 'Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter, ¹⁴ who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved.' ¹⁵ And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning. ¹⁶ Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, 'John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' ¹⁷ If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?"

In verse 13 we see Peter recalling this phrase that when he gets to Caesarea he would tell them words by which they and all their household will be saved [13]. Those words, the words by which all men are saved, is the gospel of Jesus. And he recalls this event that we see in Acts 10:34-48 where when he begins to speak the Holy Spirit fell upon them. And he quotes Jesus after his resurrection as recorded in Acts 1:5, "John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit." Then we see this unity under the gospel when Peter states that both Jews and Gentiles, and this pivotal gospel-phrase of "when we believed on the Lord Jesus

Christ” [17]. This is the heart of the Gospel... when we all believe on Jesus Christ as the only one who can save us... when we believe on Jesus Christ as the way, the truth, and the life... when we believe on Jesus Christ as the only one by whom we can come to the Father. This is the Gospel. Romans 10:9 lays it out clearly, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved.”

Peter as part of his testimony, can’t help but share the truth of the gospel. Ultimately, that’s what every testimony, every witness boils down to, the gospel what God has done and is doing in our lives. And you’ll notice that in his account of this story, his experience, he is actually sharing the gospel with the Jewish believers. We are called to share the gospel is unbelievers, but we see the Spirit-empowered work of sharing the gospel with believers as well. This testimony helps encourage, build up, and course correct other believers.

3. Gospel transformation [18]

18 When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, “Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.”

Here we see the transformative power of gospel of Jesus through testimony. The good news of the saving work of Jesus through the testimony of Peter causes these Jewish believers to glorify God [18]. Hearing what God did in the life of Peter, because of his willingness to share his testimony, brought these men to the throne of God to give Him glory. That only happens by the power of the gospel and the willingness of Peter to share.

If you are willing to share your testimony and the work that God is doing in your life right now, it will allow others the opportunity to glorify God because of that work. It will build others up. It will encourage others. But we have to be willing to share.

And they don’t just glorify God, but they come to this course-correcting realization that God has also granted to the Gentiles the repentance of life [18]. They recognize that *belief* in the saving work of Christ is the *only* thing that yields salvation. It’s not about circumcision, it’s not about the foods we eat, it’s not about whose homes we enter and don’t enter, it’s about the fact that Jesus came to fulfill the law, and when we believe in Him, we receive *His* righteousness, not our own. These men are transformed to realize the centrality of the gospel and that we cannot add or take away from it based on our traditions or beliefs.

God uses Peter to bring the gospel to Cornelius and his household, and God uses Peter’s testimony to bring these men to glorify Him. God wants to use you to be His witness of the saving work of the gospel that took place in your life. He wants you to share that to encourage others, and you have the opportunity to be a catalyst in bringing others to the point of glorifying Him simply because you are willing to share your testimony.

Study Guide Qs

Q1. *What are some ways that believers can ensure that they are not adding to or subtracting from the Gospel?*

Q2. *What are some reasons it can be challenging for believers to share the gospel through story or testimony?*

Q3. *Share an experience when someone shared a testimony or story that encouraged you, built you up, or course-corrected you?*

Q4. *Share a simple story or testimony of something God has done in your life over the last year to encourage those in your group.*

“Digging Deeper” (optional or alternative study)

1. An alternate resource on Acts 11:

https://www.blueletterbible.org/comm/guzik_david/study-guide/acts/acts-11.cfm

2. An easy tool for remembering the gospel:

<https://www.9marks.org/answer/what-gospel/>

Love your neighbors (inside + outside the group) better:

1. Who would like to share how they sought to befriend or build relationships with their neighbors inside or outside the group?

2. Are there some needs that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbors inside or outside the group?

Disciples who make disciples:

1. Who would like to share how they recently sought to make disciples?

2. Here is a disciple making idea to consider for the weeks ahead:

Share a testimony or story of what God has done in your life with a neighbor or friend.

Prayer [Loving God and Neighbors better]:

Close the NG meeting with a time of group prayer. Encourage each participant to pray, but don't force anyone to pray. Encourage the group to keep their prayers brief so that each person can pray.

Leader Notes:

1. Seek to involve as many group participants as possible. A good group discussion time allows people to get to know the passage and one another better.

2. Feel free to pre-select the discussion questions that you want to focus on in case there isn't enough time to answer them all.

3. The "Disciples Who Dig Deeper" section provides some optional or alternative study and discussion activities. As a group leader, you can choose to focus on the "Disciples Who Dig Deeper" section, include part of that section in your group meeting, or not use it at all. Try to give the group sufficient notice so they can be prepared for the meeting.

4. Every time you meet consider asking:

a. What about this passage is particularly exciting, challenging, or confusing? If a leader is uncertain about a question of doctrine or theology don't hesitate to follow-up with your coach during the week. Then revisit the issue(s) when the group gathers next time.