



A Systematic Expository Study of the Word of God

Study 18: **THE PROGRESS OF MISSIONS AND GENTILE EVANGELIZATION** **Acts 11:1-30**

The beginning of cross-cultural missions was not without some difficulties, obstacles and hindrances. The initial resistance of the first apostolic missionary was overcome by a specific revelation. Returning from this first missionary outreach, Peter was challenged by the other Apostles who yet had not understood the saving plan and purpose of God for the Gentiles. The baptism of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost took place seven years earlier, yet the Spirit-baptized ministers and members had not understood the mind of God on His free and full grace for citizens of other nations. "**They of the circumcision**", that is, the Jewish believers, thought that a Gentile must be circumcised in order to qualify for salvation from Christ. And they thought it was wrong for Peter, the Apostle, to eat with the Gentiles. They counted it unclean and unrighteous to eat Gentile food prepared by Gentiles in a Gentile manner. Cross-cultural evangelism and mission outreach will be impossible without freedom from nationalistic tradition and cultural attachments. In defending his action and preserving the vision of Gentile evangelization, Peter rehearsed God's revelation, the Spirit's interpretation and the Spirit's manifestation which convinced him of the divine approval of his action. To bring about the first cross-cultural mission outreach, God worked in so many definite and distinct ways. For Peter to resist and remain rigid and unyielding would have meant opposing the Lord and fighting against God as the council in Jerusalem did (Acts 5:38,39; 2 Chronicles 13:12; Acts 23:9; 11:17,18).

THE REVIEW AND REVELATION OF CROSS-CULTURAL MISSIONS

Acts 11:1-18; 10:3-6,9-20,22,30-32; Psalm 22:27; Isaiah 49:6; Hosea 2:23; Matthew 8:11; John 16:12,13; Acts 14:27; 15:3; 26:17-20.

'Cross-cultural missions' means mission outreach to people, communities and tribes of another culture. It means evangelistic outreach to people who are different from us in customs, social practices, pattern of life, dress and feeding, communal, social, shared characteristics. Cultures vary from nation to nation. The Jews and the Gentiles are different in many ways. Food regarded unclean by the Jews are eaten freely by the Gentiles. Patterns of dress approved and worn by Gentiles were abominations to the Jews. Circumcision, an indispensable mark for a Jew, was taboo for Gentiles. To put it mildly, the preferences of Jews were prohibitions for Gentiles. Peter, a Jew, going to Cornelius, a Gentile, to preach, fellowship, pray and lead the household to faith in Christ, was crossing from one culture to the other without changing the culture of the other. The Jews counted their culture sacred and superior. The Apostle Peter once counted all people of other cultures unclean, unacceptable and so impossible to reach, and to be given the gospel. God, by a special revelation, broke through his proud cultural shield and removed the blinds from his eyes. An angel spoke to Cornelius. God brought the clean and the "unclean" before Peter and commanded him to reach out to both with the same gospel. The Spirit spoke and bade him go. The Spirit came on the Gentiles "**as on us at the beginning**" without first compelling them to be circumcised. God's will was made clear without any shadow of doubt, and Peter had to say, "**what was I, that I could withstand God?**" Then the rest of "**the Apostles and brethren**" "**held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life**" (Acts 11:1,18). Let us not sacrifice the eternal destiny of never-dying souls for any tradition or culture, which is neither sacred, nor essential to salvation. Let us, like Peter, like Paul, forsake tradition, preferences and opinions and reach out to souls in cross-cultural mission outreach with Christ's pure, unadulterated gospel.

THE RESPONSE AND RESOURCEFULNESS OF CONSECRATED MISSIONARIES

Acts 11:19-26; 8:1-5; 17:6,16-18; 19:10-12,20; Ephesians 3:8; 1 Thessalonians 1:5-10; Acts 14:22; 15:19,20; 11:21-24; Ezra 7:6,10,28; Ezekiel 37:1-10; Matthew 28:18-20.

"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" (Acts 11:19). From this point, the course of the history of the Church takes a new direction. The narrative now goes back to the time of "**the persecution that arose about Stephen**". Those who were "**scattered abroad**" "**travelled as**

far as Antioch” “preaching the Word”. “Some of them spake unto the Grecians (Gentiles), preaching the Lord Jesus” (Acts 11:20). Those who brought the gospel to Antioch were not Apostles. This was an important step in the forward march of the Church. Antioch was the third city of the Roman Empire and it has been called “the Paris of the ancient world”. From here, Paul and his companions later went forth on their missionary journeys, taking the gospel to the Gentiles. These unnamed disciples who first preached the gospel in Antioch kept the salvation message free from the ceremonial laws of Judaism. These unordained, unpaid evangelists and missionaries set a great example of missionary outreach during the triumphant period of the Church’s history. If the early Church had committed the work of pastors and missionaries to only employed preachers and evangelists, their world would never have been evangelized. If they all had to be paid for their services, very few churches would have been established. **“And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord” (Acts 11:21).** The expression, the hand, the arm, the finger of God or of the Lord, means, the power, the might, the supernatural miracle-working energy of God. The power of God which followed them and impressed their preaching on the hearts of the hearers, convicted and converted them. The Lord working with the ministers of the Word, caused **“a great number”** to believe that Jesus was the Christ, who died and rose again for their justification. Believing, they turned away from their sins, transgressions, iniquities, vanities, idols, evil ways (Acts 3:26; 14:15; 1 Thessalonians 1:9; Jonah 3:10) and turned wholeheartedly to the Lord.

THEIR READINESS FOR THE RESPONSIBILITY OF A CARING MINISTRY

Acts 11:27-30; 15:32; Ephesians 4:11-14; Matthew 7:15-23; 24:23-25; 2 Peter 2:1-3,18-22; 2 Corinthians 8:2-5; Acts 4:34; Romans 15:25-27; Luke 19:10,13; Romans 1:14-16; 1 Corinthians 9:16-23.

“And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch.” In the New Testament, **“prophets”** were teachers, and instructors sent from God. To teach the people the doctrine of Christ and the way to heaven was a major part of the prophetic office (1 Corinthians 14:3; Mark 11:32; Luke 1:76; 7:28; 16:29-31; Acts 3:22,23; 15:32; Ephesians 2:20; 3:5; 4:11-14; 2 Peter 3:2). Foretelling the future by revelation and inspiration of the Spirit was also part of the prophetic office. **“Agabus signified by the Spirit that there should be dearth throughout all the world.”** A world-wide famine was prophesied. So the believers **“determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea.”** These Gentile believers felt compelled to send relief to the Jewish brethren. They had received immeasurable spiritual benefit from the Jewish church so they were willing to show gratitude and send material things to them to meet or supply their temporal needs. They sent the needed help **“by the hands of Barnabas and Saul”**, the leading ministers in the Church. Responding to the spiritual needs of communities and nations in famine demands that we send the best of our ministers. **“Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD: And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, and shall not find it”** (Amos 8:11,12). The most grievous of all famines is the famine of hearing the words of the Lord. This is a period of severe spiritual famine in many countries all over the world. Many famished souls wander from place to place seeking the true way of salvation, seeking the nourishing Word of God but they are dying without hope of heaven. We cannot keep to ourselves and act unconcerned. We must send **“relief”**, send **“the bread of life”** and **“the water of life”**, the gracious gospel of God, to perishing souls in other nations. And we must be willing to send the most faithful, the most effective and the most spiritual of our ministers and members to reach the unreached before they become unreachable.

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