

Bible Reading Challenge 44: THE CHURCH – TO THE GENTILES

Ages 4-8

Key verse: “But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as [the Gentiles] will.” Acts 15:11

We ended last week’s reading with the gospel spreading out from Jerusalem after Stephen died. The Christians were shocked, but not God, of course. It was all part of His plan, and today we come to another part that plan. Or not just a “part,” but a whole era. What happens in these chapters is *huge*, because the Holy Spirit is going to knock down the wall that has separated Jews and Gentiles for centuries.

Who is a Gentile? Most of us who are reading along in this Bible Challenge are Gentiles. Jews, at that time, were people born in Abraham’s family, God’s special people, and Gentiles were everybody else. The relationship between Jews and Gentiles was not very good. Jews might shop in the same places as Gentiles, but Jews who were serious about following God’s law would never marry a Gentile, or worship with them, or even eat with them. But this wasn’t God’s long-term plan. In the early days He said the Israelites shouldn’t marry the other nations because the Israelites would adopt their idols. Which of course they did. But God promised Abraham that *all* nations would be blessed through him, not just Israelites. Gentiles like Rahab, Ruth, and Naaman had been blessed, but not the nations as a whole. That’s the next big step in the gospel plan, and it starts now, through a man named Cornelius.

Notice that the story of Cornelius is told twice. The emphasis shows that God really wanted His people to pay attention to it. Cornelius was a “God-fearer”: someone who worshipped the true God but was not circumcised and couldn’t call himself a Jew. As you’ll find out, Peter—a Jew—didn’t feel it was ok to be around someone like that. But Jesus gave Peter the keys to the kingdom (Matt.), which meant he was the one to unlock this door.

There are two other milestones this week: 1) the establishment of the first missionary center outside Jerusalem, in Antioch of Syria; and 2) the name given to followers of Jesus Christ—a mocking term, but one they’ve proudly accepted ever since.

Reading for this week: Acts 10-11; 13-15; Galatians 1:11-2:16
Further passages: Genesis 12:13, Amos 9:11-12, Eph. 2:11-22

Questions

1. Does God send Peter to Cornelius because Cornelius was a good man?
2. What is the significance of the gift of the Holy Spirit in Acts 11:17?
3. In Acts 11:17 Peter defends his baptizing Cornelius by insisting he could not stand in the way of the Holy Spirit. What things try to stand in the way of the Holy Spirit today?
4. Find and mark all references to the Holy Spirit in these chapters (I found 9). What does He do?
5. Where did Paul and Barnabas go first in every new city? Why? (See 14:46) Who gave them the most trouble and why?
6. What’s the most important sentence in Paul’s sermon of Acts 13?
7. What was the first major problem confronting the church? (see 15:15) How was it resolved? How does Paul speak of it in Galatians? What great principle came out of this meeting? (See 15:11)
8. What is the “yoke” Peter speaks of in 15:10-11? Why does he say that “neither we nor our fathers” were able to bear it?

Activities

- **Guided Play:** Ask your child to bring a small blanket. Spread it on the floor. Then ask them to bring six or seven different kinds of toys or stuffed animals. Read about Peter's vision of the blanket lowered from heaven. Explain that in the Old Testament, God had made some animals and things either clean or unclean. For instance, Jews could not eat pork. Pretend that some of the toys are unclean, and so cannot be touched or used. Put some on the blanket, and pretend these are the clean toys. Then act out Peter's dream, showing that now all the toys are clean. Talk about what this meant for clean and unclean animals in Peter's day, and what that meant for someone like Cornelius.
- **Draw It:** List the unclean animals named in Leviticus 11:2-47 and include some of them in a drawing of Peter's vision.
- **Build It:** Have your child build a wall of blocks. Put a few toys/stuffed animals on each side, and talk about how they cannot be together or be friends. Explain that was a little like the Jews and Gentiles. Then act out how Jesus knocks down that wall. You can also talk about how we build walls between people we don't like, but Jesus can knock those down, too.