



THE PENTECOSTAL REVIVAL IN JUDEA AND THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

WEEK 9
01.31.16



FOCUS VERSE

Acts 9:32

And it came to pass, as Peter passed throughout all quarters, he came down also to the saints which dwell at Lydda.

LESSON TEXT

Acts 10:1–8

1 There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band,

2 A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.

3 He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius.

4 And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.

5 And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter:

6 He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.

7 And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually;

8 And when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa.



FOCUS THOUGHT

The Pentecostal revival went beyond the Jews and the Samaritans to the Gentiles.



CULTURE CONNECTION

Spreading the Gospel

Cornelius, a Roman centurion who believed in God, lived in Caesarea. “Once the site of a Phoenician port, . . . Herod built Caesarea into the grandest city other than Jerusalem in Palestine, with a deep sea harbor . . . aqueduct, hippodrome, and magnificent amphitheater. . . . Herod renamed the city Caesarea in honor of the emperor” (*jewishvirtuallibrary.org*).

The population of Caesarea during the time of the Book of Acts was approximately half Gentile and half Jewish; therefore it was a divided city. Though Cornelius was a Gentile, revival broke out in his house when Peter, a Jew, preached the gospel to the people who had gathered to hear him. (See Acts 10.)

Revival spread from Jerusalem and Judea to the ends of the earth. Those who went everywhere preaching the gospel encountered the same opposition the church encounters today.

Although cultures change with the centuries, opposition and people do not change that much. Whether an “easy” field or a “hard” field, we must be willing to brace ourselves against the opposition and share the gospel with everyone we can.

Jesus Christ gave His life for all human beings, regardless of their nationality. The new birth experience is for everyone: “For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off” (Acts 2:39).

OUTLINE

I. REVIVAL SPREADS

- A. Peter’s Movements
- B. Peter’s Miracles
- C. Peter’s Ministry

II. A MULTITUDE OF THE GENTILES SAVED

- A. The Planting of the Church in Antioch
- B. The Persecution of the Church in Jerusalem
- C. The Progress of the Church at Large

CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

As a kid visiting in the Boston Mountains of northwest Arkansas, this writer first experienced the tendency of animals to move from one place to another, going the same way until a worn path was established. These animal trails lace wilderness areas not only of northwest Arkansas but wherever animals exist, because animals are creatures of habit.

Humans too are creatures of habit. We have a tendency to sit in the same pew at church, take the same route home, and choose the same menu items in a restaurant. But as much

as we may be confined to well-established patterns of activity and choice, the gospel is not. If the gospel could be personified, it would always seek a new trail, a different person to help, and another region to reach. It is not confined to a particular geographical area; neither is it exclusive to a particular race.

The Pentecostal revival that began in Judea soon spread to Samaria and then beyond to the Gentiles. This was in keeping with Jesus’ command: “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). Not only did the early church obey this command, but believers since have tried to spread the gospel to everyone in the world.

When Jesus gave this command in Mark 16:15, He meant for the gospel to have a global application. We are to keep reaching areas of our world that have not been evangelized until every person has heard the gospel.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. REVIVAL SPREADS

Revival spreads much like a forest fire, but this simile is not an adequate figure of speech to define revival. A forest fire spreads, but it can be

extinguished. A revival cannot be extinguished or controlled. If the revival is a sovereign move of God, it may be hindered, but it cannot be stopped because God cannot be stopped.

Revival is a divine response to a human application. II Chronicles 7:14 gave the people of Israel four requirements: "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." We must humble ourselves, pray, seek His face, and turn from our wicked ways.

Revival is not always the loud sound of a rushing mighty wind. Sometimes it is a gentle breeze wafting slowly through families and communities. Regardless of how it comes, revival spreads.

The church of the first century had to depend on preaching, word-of-mouth, and scrolls to spread the Word. We now have many facets of the media to help us send the gospel to various regions of the world. These modern vehicles of transmission help us to spread revival more rapidly.

A. Peter's Movements

"And it came to pass, as Peter passed throughout all quarters, he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda" (Acts 9:32).

As the Pentecostal revival could not be contained in the upper room, neither could Peter be confined to Jerusalem. The Holy Ghost fell in Jerusalem in Acts 2. Seven chapters later we find him twenty miles away in Lydda. This began his reaching into other regions with the gospel.

God did not intend for the early church to remain in Jerusalem but to fan out and spread the gospel. Neither does He intend for us to congregate in one locale but to reach for the regions beyond. He came from Heaven to Earth to save the world, leaving us an example that we must leave the comfort of our domicile and share the gospel wherever we can with whomever we can.

Although we do not know how to define "all quarters" in the verse above, it does imply that Peter did not remain in Jerusalem. Obviously he ministered in numerous areas

before arriving in Lydda. The extent of his ministry is not known, but it is most certain as he passed through all quarters he witnessed of the gospel.

The gospel burned in Peter's soul. He did not remain long in one place. Something in his spirit kept pushing him onward. He had the "go ye into all the world" motivation stamped indelibly upon his soul.

In the early 1900s, many pioneer Pentecostal preachers were criticized for not staying long in one place. For example, C. P. Kilgore constantly moved from one area to another holding revivals, establishing churches, and moving on. Although they did not reach everyone in the areas in which they ministered, they left seeds of the gospel to germinate in their absence.

This writer's grandfather went to Arkansas in the early 1900s, obeying what God showed him in a dream. He saw a man with an ax, and God told him to go to Arkansas and build a church where he found a man with an ax. Putting his large family into their touring car, he drove toward Arkansas from Oklahoma. As he neared Winslow, Arkansas, he saw a man with an ax. When he told the man his dream, the man began to weep saying, "We have been praying for God to send us someone to start a church." Granddad pulled over into the edge of the woods and set up camp. The man and he chopped down trees, made a brush arbor, and had a great revival. Granddad and family stayed all summer and into the fall, witnessing a mighty move of God. There is a church in that small town today being pastored by a grandson of the man with the ax.

B. Peter's Miracles

Two amazing miracles occurred during Peter's ministry in the vicinity of Lydda. A palsied man who had been bedfast for eight years received his healing. Peter said, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed. And he arose immediately" (Acts 9:34). This miracle resulted in many turning to the Lord in Lydda and in Saron (Acts 9:35).

The other miracle that occurred in this area at the hands of Peter was the raising of Tabitha, or Dorcas, from the dead. Dorcas lived in Joppa, a town on the coast of the Mediterranean about ten miles from Lydda. She

was a woman “full of good works and alms-deeds which she did” (Acts 9:36). People in that area were well acquainted with the coats and garments she made. (See Acts 9:39.)

When Dorcas died, disciples sent to Lydda for Peter, for they heard he was in that area. When he came, he asked everyone to leave the room. Kneeling down, he prayed, and turning to the body, he said, “Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up” (Acts 9:40).

This miracle became known throughout Joppa. As a result, many people believed in the Lord. (See Acts 9:42.) Miracles always attract attention. The curious who are attracted to these miracles are often more open to the gospel, for they are aware something supernatural has occurred.

C. Peter’s Ministry

Simon Peter preached the keynote message on the Day of Pentecost. He also was the one who first took the gospel to the Gentiles.

Two commands contributed to Peter’s first ministry to the Gentiles. Both commands were part of visions given to two men, thirty miles apart—Cornelius in Caesarea and Peter in Joppa.

Cornelius, a Roman centurion, was not the normal Gentile. He was “a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always” (Acts 10:2).

One day an angel appeared to Cornelius and said, “Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: he lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do” (Acts 10:4–6).

As the men whom Cornelius sent to find Peter were approaching Joppa, God dealt with Simon Peter as he waited for the meal to be prepared in Simon’s house. In a vision the Lord showed Peter a sheet let down from Heaven containing all kinds of animals forbidden for a Jew to eat. A voice said, “Rise, Peter; kill, and eat” (Acts 10:13). Peter answered, “Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean” (Acts 10:14). But God replied, “What God hath cleansed, that

call not thou common” (Acts 10:15). This scenario was repeated two more times.

While Peter was wondering what this vision meant, the men sent from Cornelius arrived at the door and asked for Simon Peter. God immediately spoke to him to go with the men and not to doubt. The next day Peter accompanied the men to Cornelius’s house. (See Acts 10:17–24.)

What a tremendous lesson to be learned by all witnessing believers! It is easy to respond carnally to the command to reach our world by witnessing only to the kind of people who are like us. On the other hand, we may feel a burden for those less fortunate. But sometimes what we interpret to be a burden may be sympathy, having more concern for the down-and-out than for the wealthy. However, Jesus Christ died for all—the well-heeled as well as the impoverished and everyone in between.

What an interesting meeting took place when Peter, the bigoted Jew, and Cornelius, the hungry Gentile, met. Cornelius fell down and worshiped the apostle, but Peter immediately forbade him. After Cornelius related what occasioned his sending for Peter (Acts 10:30–33), Peter began to share the gospel story with this Gentile and all who had gathered in his house to hear Peter.

While Peter was preaching, the Holy Ghost fell upon the audience, and they began to speak with tongues. This phenomenon astonished the Jewish believers who had come with Peter. (See Acts 10:44–46.) The convincing sign of speaking with tongues the Gentiles received that day was the same sign received by the Jewish believers on the Day of Pentecost. It is still the initial sign of the reception of the baptism of the Holy Ghost.

Like Cornelius, many people who do not have the truth want to know more about God. Their sincere attitude and devotion to the Lord will contribute to their exposure to more truth if they will let the Lord lead them. Believing truth as it is revealed to us ensures the continued revelation of more truth. Jesus told Nathaniel, “Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these” (John 1:50). This demonstrates that the continuity of revelation is contingent upon the continuity of belief. “Then shall we know, if we follow on to know

the LORD” (Hosea 6:3). “In thy light shall we see light” (Psalm 36:9).

II. A MULTITUDE OF THE GENTILES SAVED

“Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled. . . . And some of them were men of Cypress and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord” (Acts 11:19–21).

This is a partial fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah 60:3: “And the Gentiles shall come to thy light.” Much like insects are drawn to light, people are drawn to the light of the Lord. Jesus said, “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me” (John 12:32). After the Holy Ghost fell on the Jewish nation in the early chapters of Acts, it was not unusual for it to fall on the Gentiles. Joel’s prophecy said, “I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh” (Joel 2:28).

A. The Planting of the Church in Antioch

The silver lining in the dark cloud of persecution that followed the outpouring of the Holy Ghost on the Day of Pentecost was the spreading of the gospel to other areas. “They that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word” (Acts 8:4). As a result, the Grecian city of Antioch received the word of the Lord. When the church at Jerusalem heard the report, they sent Barnabas to assist with the revival. Apparently realizing it was too much responsibility for one man, Barnabas went to Tarsus to enlist the help of Paul in this endeavor. In Antioch, Barnabas and Paul “assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people.” The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. (See Acts 11:19–26.)

B. The Persecution of the Church in Jerusalem

Although the persecution that came on the heels of the outpouring of the Holy Ghost scattered the disciples who went everywhere

preaching the gospel, some of the disciples stayed in Jerusalem. Some of those who stayed were influential in the leadership of the early church headquartered in Jerusalem.

Being used by Satan to attempt to thwart the progress of the early church, King Herod began a persecution of the church that included the killing of James, brother of John, and the jailing of Peter. After arresting Peter, Herod put him in prison “and delivered him to four quarters of soldiers to keep him” (Acts 12:4).

However, being guarded by sixteen soldiers and being bound with two chains were not enough security measures to keep Peter in prison. In the night as an angel appeared before him, his chains fell off, and a light shined in the prison. The angel told Peter to get dressed and to follow him. Peter did as he was told, and the angel led him through the first and second wards. When they came to the main gate, it “opened to them of his own accord” (Acts 12:10). The iron gate spoken of here became an automatic gate when the angel approached.

This should encourage all believers, for often we find ourselves locked in the jail of disappointment and failure. But if we will follow the Lord, the chains of bondage will fall off, and things that may appear to be closed to us will begin to open. Nothing is closed or locked with God. He has the key to every door and gate in the world. Jesus said, “I am the door” (John 10:9).

“Forthwith the angel departed from him” (Acts 12:10).

As quickly as miraculous happenings took place when the angel appeared, normalcy returned when the angel left. Peter was stranded in the middle of town late at night knowing the authorities would soon be alerted to his escape.

There comes a time in the experience of every believer when “the angel” leaves. What does one do then? Anyone can follow the footsteps of an angel, but it takes faith to keep walking when the angel leaves. Living for God requires faithfulness whether or not His presence is felt.

After realizing that what just happened was real and not a vision, Peter considered where he should go. He made his way to the house of John Mark’s mother, where believers were

praying for his deliverance. But instead of gaining immediate admittance when he knocked, Rhoda, the young girl who came to the door of the gate, recognized Peter's voice and excitedly ran back into the house to alert the believers to his presence. When Rhoda did not let him in, Peter continued knocking. At last someone came and opened the door for him to enter.

When Peter was walking with the angel, he witnessed an iron gate open automatically. But after the angel departed, he came to a simple yard gate and had to knock. We sometimes witness the miraculous opening of gates and doors that should have defied our passage only to come to a gate that will not open. In these circumstances we must continue to knock as the apostle did. Matthew 7:7 says, "Knock, and it shall be opened unto you." The Amplified Bible says, "Keep on knocking." We must knock and keep on knocking.

When angels leave and doors do not open, we must continue to trust God. Faith is not needed when angels are physically leading us and doors are opening. Faith is needed when things do not go the way we expect them to go.

C. The Progress of the Church at Large

"But the word of God grew and multiplied" (Acts 12:24).

The early church of the first century experienced great growth. The persecution Satan launched to thwart its progress only served to broaden its circumference. The church grew in spite of the attempts to limit its growth.

REFLECTIONS

- Discuss the factors that caused revival to spread in the first century.
- Why was Peter at first opposed to preaching to Gentiles?
- What was God telling Peter in the vision on the housetop?
- How did the Jewish believers who accompanied Peter know the Gentiles had received the Holy Ghost?
- Discuss what it means to be called a Christian.

An old Spanish proverb says, "The dogs bark, but the caravan rolls on." Persecution could not stop God's "caravan." Persecution cannot stop it today and will not stop it in the future. Jesus said, "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18).

Although there was subtraction and division in the early church (Acts 5:1–10; I Corinthians 3:3–4), God "added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47). God's body, the church, is a viable entity that persecution and opposition have failed to destroy. The Pentecostal revival that began in Judea has spread to the ends of the earth.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

This lesson should challenge believers to press on regardless of the opposition. If the early church persevered during persecution, surely believers today can hold out victoriously to the end. Jesus said, "But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved" (Matthew 24:13).

Although the opposition in North America today may be different from what the early church suffered, there is opposition. As the early church was productive and experienced growth, we as believers can experience the same. We must focus on the fields and not on the foe. We must take advantage of the freedom to worship and share our beliefs. Not all Christians have this freedom in other parts of the world. As many are being killed for their beliefs, let us do what we can to make it possible for the gospel to be available to everyone everywhere. ■