

11

Acts of the Apostles

Living Praise Presbyterian Church - Home Cell Group Bible Study Feb-Jul 2001



TOUGH TESTS

.....

I Reported to the Other Eleven Apostles

Jerusalem

Soon the news reached the apostles and believers in Judea that the Gentiles had received the word of God. But when I arrived back in Jerusalem, some of the Jewish believers criticized me. “You entered the home of Gentiles and even ate with them!”

Then I told them exactly what had happened. “One day in Joppa,” I said, “while I was praying, I went into a trance and saw a vision. Something like a large sheet was let down by its four corners from the sky. And it came right down to me. When I looked inside the sheet, I saw all sorts of small animals, wild animals, reptiles, and birds that we are not allowed to eat. And I heard a voice say, ‘Get up, Peter; kill and eat them.’

“ ‘Never, Lord,’ I replied. ‘I have never eaten anything forbidden by our Jewish laws.’

“But the voice from heaven came again, ‘If God says something is acceptable, do not say it isn’t.’

“this happened three times before the sheet and all it contained was pulled back into heaven. Just then three men who had been sent from Caesarea arrived at the house where I was staying. The Holy Spirit told me to go with them and not to worry about their being Gentiles. These six brothers here accompanied me, and we soon arrived at the home of the man who had sent for us. He told us how an angel had appeared to him in his home and had told him, ‘Send messengers to Joppa to find Simon Peter. He will tell you how you and all your household will be saved!’

“Well, I began telling them the Good News, but just as I was getting started, the Holy Spirit fell on them, just as he fell on us at the beginning. Then I thought of the Lord’s words when he said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with Holy Spirit.’ And since God gave these Gentiles the same gift he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to argue?”

When the others heard this, all their objections were answered and they began praising God. They said, “God has also given the Gentiles the privilege of turning from sin and receiving eternal life.”

From An Eye-witness Account of the First Century Events by The Men Who Lived It



Luke set up the stories of Peter and Cornelius and Ananias and Saul with amazing symmetry. The Holy Spirit simultaneously prepared the heart of Ananias and of Saul - as he simultaneously prepared those of Peter and Cornelius. Peter questioned and hesitated, as did Ananias. Peter doubted whether he could be friends with the Gentiles. Ananias whether he could approach the enemy of the church. Both obeyed without hesitation when God makes his divine will known.

These stories come together in today's study. Peter defends his ministry to Cornelius to the church at Jerusalem. He convinces them of God's work in the Gentiles. It is also here that Saul, that one-time enemy of the church reappears as a minister to the church in Antioch, a church filled with both Jew and Gentile Christians.

REFLECTION:

Have you ever been criticized by other Christians for doing what was right? What was the circumstances? How did you respond?

DISCOVERY:

1. Read Acts 11:1-30. What kind of reception was awaiting Peter when he went back up to Jerusalem?
2. What can we learn from the way Peter responded to his critics?
3. What seemed to be the final and most convincing proof to Peter of God's working in the Gentiles (vv15-17)? Why?
4. In the meantime the gospel is spreading to Gentiles at a tremendous rate in Antioch. What kind of care is provided for new believers (vv22-30)?
5. What was the reason for, and the results of, Barnabas' trip to Antioch (vv22-30)?

RESPONSE:

A. What are you like when someone criticizes you?

B. What kind of evidence of new life do you look for in new believers?

C. How does our care for new believers compare and contrast to the care given here?

D. How do you see, in this passage, the true meaning of “Christian” being more fully discovered and lived out in a multicultural church and society?

E. How does LPPC and the Christian community need to experience this more?



It's a wonderful day indeed when we stop working for God and begin working with God. (Yes, go ahead and reread the sentence again.)

For years I viewed God as a compassionate CEO and my role as a loyal sales rep. He had his office, and I had my territory. I could contact him as much as I wanted. He was always a phone or a fax (or an email) away. He encouraged me, rallied behind me, and supported me, but he didn't go with me. At least I didn't think he did. Then I read 2 Corinthians 6:1.

Fellow workers? Collaborers? God and I work together? Imagine the paradigm shift this truth creates. Rather than report to God, we work *with* God. Rather than check in with him and then leave, we check in with him and then follow. We are always in his presence. We never leave church. There is never a non-sacred moment! His presence never diminishes. Our awareness of his presence may falter, but the reality of his presence never changes.

This leads me to a great question. If God is perpetually present, is it possible to enjoy unceasing communion with him? Let's take the thought further. A giant step further. What if our daily communion never ceased? Would it be possible to live - minute by minute - in the presence of God? Is such intimacy even possible?

From *Just Like Jesus* by Max Lucado



Topical Study: Angels

Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision. (Acts 12:9).

Then Peter came to himself and said, "Now I know without a doubt that the Lord sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches and from everything the Jewish people were anticipating." (Acts 12:15)

Throughout the book of Acts, as well as in many other parts of the Bible, there are frequent references to angels. Many people however, have very vague or erroneous ideas about angels. Angels are an entirely different order of created beings from man. Believers in Christ are saints but are not and never will be angels. The blessedness of saints is far greater than any experience of angels.

The word translated "angel" means literally "messenger," a word suggesting one of the angels' major functions. The following outline describes some important truths that the Bible teaches about these created beings.

I The Nature of Angels

1. Angels are spirits (Heb 1:13-14; Ps 104:4), created by God (Ne 9:6; Col 1:16) before the creation of man (Job 38:7).

2. Though angels do not have bodies, they have revealed themselves in bodily form to men, conversing with them (Mt 1:20; Jn 20:12-13; Ac 7:30; 12:7-8).

3. They are exceedingly numerous, constituting a company, not a race (Mt 26:53; Heb 12:22; Rev 5:11; Lk 20:34-36).

4. They have great power and intelligence (Mt 28:2, 4; Ac 5:19; 12:7; 2 Pe 2:11; Rev 20:1-3; 2 Sa 24:15-16; 2 Ki 19:35; Ps 103:20).

5. They are glorious beings (Mt 28:2-3; Rev 10:1).

6. They do not marry or die (Mt 22:30; Lk 20:35-36).

7. They are not to be worshipped (Col 2:18; Rev 22:8-9).

8. There are good angels and evil angels. Satan was the first of the angels to rebel against his Creator (cf. Lk 10:18 and Rev 12:7-9 with Eze 28:12-19; Isa 14:12-15). Of the evil angels that followed his example, some are now imprisoned in Tartarus (2 Pe 2:4; Jude 6); others are free to support their leader, Satan, in his work (Mt 25:41; Ro 8:38; 1 Co 6:3; Eph 1:21; 6:12; Col 2:15; Rev 9:14). Demons would also be classified as evil spirits permitted the freedom to serve their leader (Mt 8:16; 10:1, 8; Lk 10:17, 20). The ultimate destiny of Satan and his angels is everlasting fire (Mt 25:41; Rev 20:10).

II. The Ministry of Holy Angels

1. They Praise and worship God and His Son Jesus (Ps 103:20; 148:2; Lk. 2:13; Heb 1:6; Rev 5:11).

2. They execute God's judgments and purposes (Nu 22:22; Mt 13:41; Ac 12:23). They have special functions at important junctions of world history. For example, angels were used to the law to Israel on Mount Sinai (Gal 3:19). A multitude of angels sang praises to God on the birth of the Child Jesus (Lk 2:13-14). An angels served in connection with the vision of the gospel to Gentiles (Ac 10:3). And angels will serve in special capacities in the events of the last days (e.g. 2 Th 1:7).

3. They minister to God's people in guiding, protecting, and strengthening (Ge 19:11; 1 Ki 19:5-7; Ps 34:7; 91:11; Da 3:28; 6:22; Mt 4:11; 18:10; Ac 5:19; 12:7-10; Heb 1:14). Note their ministry to Jesus (e.g. Mt 4:11).

4. They will accompany Christ at His final appearances in the history of this world, for example, at the rapture (1 Th 4:16) and the last judgment (Mt 25:31; 2 Th 1:7). They will continue to serve Him for eternity (cf. Rev 21:12).

How inconceivably glorious will that day be when innumerable hosts like the shining ones described in Revelation 10:1 and Matthew 28:2-3 shall suddenly appear together with Christ, who outshines them all as the sun outshines a tallow candle, coming in the clouds of heaven to this earth. This is no fancy but a literal fact that shall take place one day. Those who are ashamed to confess their faith in Christ and His Word should note what is said of them in Mark 8:38.

A Final Thought:

Prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God (Acts 12:5).

We are so dependent on God for everything that the breath of prayer should be as indispensable as the breath of our lungs. It could be that our prayer life has waned because we are not really conscious of our dependency on God.

Sources:

Irving Jensen. **Acts - A Self-study Guide.**

Max Lucado. **Just Like Jesus.**