

The Mystery Begins To Be Unveiled—Acts 10:1-16—3/1/26
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Open your Bibles to Acts 10 & let's read the whole section in Acts 10:1-11:18 to get the narrative & its explanation—10-11:18. [READ]

As we saw last week, God was preparing Peter for this **further** ministry, further geographically & ethnically & nationally.

Acts 10-11 record the official movement of the Messiah's message to the nations, preaching Jesus to the Gentiles, to those outside of Israel.

Peter was the lead Apostle of the 12, the spokesman & the one to whom Jesus had entrusted the keys of the kingdom.

Those keys were passed down to the church by the proclamation of the Gospel, not by any Roman Catholic papal succession from Peter.

But Peter was chief among those confirmed by miracles in this transitional time as the NT was written & the church began.

God prepared Peter in Gentile territory as he healed Aeneas in Lydda & raised Dorcas from the dead in Joppa.

We ended last week with Peter at the house of a tanner, which many would see as unclean because of the dead animal skins.

But that religious taboo was far less than what Peter faced next when he crossed a line that you & I most likely do not fully grasp.

Most of us have been exposed to the Bible & the Gospel of Jesus Christ much of our lives as if it belonged to our tribe.

We cannot imagine the alienation from God & His promises that would have been expected & experienced by the Gentiles.

We struggle to envision access to God only through 1 nation that was not your nation like everyone outside Israel faced.

Yet when we consider that this is both the longest section in Acts & the account that is referenced the most, we need to ponder such things.

We need to begin by answering some questions that will help us appreciate the grace that is certified to Gentiles in Acts 10.

So today I'm going to answer 2 questions for our outline & then we'll start getting into the details of Acts 10 next week.

And first, we must be clear that a Gentile is a non-Jew, someone not descended from the nation of Israel.

The 1st question today is this—what's the big deal about the Gentiles?

I mean, in Acts 10, Cornelius is a likable guy who's devout & God-fearing & generous, so what's the big deal about him?

Question #1 of 2 questions today to set up our study of Acts 10-11—our 1st point, is this—What is the big deal about the Gentiles?

To answer that, we need to think back on the OT because the Bible is a chronologically progressive revelation.

As God had chosen to show Noah grace amidst judgment, so God chose to show grace to Abram after judgment at the Tower of Babel.

And Genesis 12:1-3 gives the Abrahamic covenant, God's unconditional promises as He initiated that relationship.

It was all of God's grace because everyone deserved judgment for sin.

Everyone in Noah's time & Abraham's time, including Noah & Abraham, deserved punishment & salvation was all by grace.

Genesis 15:6 says Abraham believed God, meaning he trusted God's words of promise, & that was credited to him as righteousness.

So listen: that is the way to be right with God for all time, to be counted as righteous & not have your sins counted against you.

Whether you lived long ago or you are sitting here today, the only way to be right with God is by faith in His promises of grace.

And God has made specific promises of grace for blessing & not cursing like in Abraham's time in Genesis 12:1-3.

He told Abram, *"I will make you a great nation, & I will bless you, & make your name great; & so you shall be a blessing; & I will bless those who bless you, & the one who curses you I will curse. & in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."*

Don't miss that categorical statement of blessing for those who bless Abraham & cursing otherwise—God said to be blessed, bless Abraham, but He didn't say yet how He would do so.

Of course, that's not a mandate to approve everything in modern Israel now when they are mostly unbelieving & rejecting God's promises.

As Romans 11:28-29 says, *"From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable."*

So even though Israel has not nationally recognized their Messiah, the point is that God will not revoke His gifts & calling to ethnic Israel & that is rooted in His promises to their fathers, Abraham, Isaac & Jacob.

But listen—that's part of what makes Acts 10 such a big deal!

Acts 10 is a big deal because it begins to unveil blessing on all the families of the earth—the Gentiles—so we want to pay attention how.

This is even more amazing when you realize that God's promises of blessing narrowed more as time went on.

For example, God's covenant promises to David for a king & a kingdom do not mention how that kingdom will bless other nations.

You can read God's covenant with David in 2nd Samuel 7 how God only mentioned Israel & David's Seed & His kingdom.

And turn with me to Jeremiah 31, to God's promises of a New Covenant & notice the narrow focus on Israel & Judah there.

We could see more focus on just Israel & Judah in the context, but let's just read a few verses—Jeremiah 31:31-34. [READ]

God made a covenant with Israel through Moses at Mount Sinai when God took them out of the land of Egypt.

And God says here that He will make a New Covenant with those same people, with that same nation.

So stop & think—what did we read about Gentiles in that passage?

Nothing—we know God forgives iniquity & remembers sin no more because of Jesus, but that is only promised to Israel there.

Similarly, turn to Ezekiel 36, another revelation of the New Covenant God promised to Israel & let's read Ezekiel 36:22-28. [READ]

These promises of being clean & having a new heart & a new spirit are truths we cherish as NT believers in Jesus, right?

But again, these are promises to Israel as a nation among other nations, as God's chosen nation among whom He will vindicate His name.

The other nations, the Gentiles, are only mentioned there as the audience that will see that Yahweh is God.

So in answer to today's 1st question—what's the big deal about the Gentiles?—it's that God did not focus His specific promises on them.

So in a sense, going to the Gentiles was not on Peter's to-do list or his 5-year goals or 10-year plan.

Remember—it had already been at least 3 years & maybe over 5 years since the church began & they had not reached out to Gentiles.

God had to make that move undeniably & undoubtedly clear.

God mentioned the Gentiles in promises to Abraham, but He did not speak to them specifically in the Davidic & New Covenants.

So grace is the big deal about the Gentiles.

God did more than He promised & the Gentiles were not left out.

You might ask how any Gentile can receive the promises of forgiveness & a new heart & all we see in the New Covenant?

Most of us are not descended from Israel to say those are our promises.

We are not ethnically or nationally entitled to claim those promises as belonging to us by inheritance from our families.

In the massive divide between Jews & Gentiles in the NT era, no one would think that Gentiles would ever be called spiritual Israel or Jews.

I know some faithful Christians believe that, but that minimizes the majesty of God's grace superabounding to the Gentiles.

The big deal is that God will not only keep His promises to Israel by His grace, but He is also spreading blessing to the nations by His grace

The big deal is God did not confine His promises only to Israel, but He moves in mercy to whoever He wishes for His glory.

Think of it like this—if you come over to my house, you will see that my kids generally eat whatever food they want in our kitchen & they use the bathrooms & whatever they need.

It's like they have the right to do so!—and even the adult ones who have moved out still feel free to come & go as they please.

But when you come to my house, you typically wait for food to be served or offered & you ask if you can use the bathroom & anything.

That minimal distinction illustrates how Gentiles have no right or expectation to be treated by God like we are His family.

We are all born sinners & cannot expect that we deserve God's blessings because we were born or grew up in Israel or in the church.

And more so, we as Gentiles had no claim on what God promised to Israel's heirs when He restores them.

So the overflowing marvel is that God always works only by His grace to save disobedient sinners so that He always rightly gets the glory.

That's the climaxing point Paul reached in Romans 11:30-36.

Romans 11:30-36 says: *“For just as you [Gentiles] once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their [Jews] disobedience, so these [Jews] also now have been disobedient, that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy. For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all. Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.”*

Paul wrote that after describing how God will save Israel after a time of their partial hardening while He saves Gentiles.

God has scripted history to show that He is the source, means, & end of all blessing, all by His grace & for His glory & no one can boast.

And the big deal about the Gentiles in Acts 10 is that it began that time of the Gentiles being saved across all nations.

The big deal is that we gather as mostly Gentiles trusting & singing of those promises applied to us through faith in Jesus as Israel's Messiah.

And it's not that Gentiles or the church replaced Israel or that God changed His promises or that we become spiritual Israel.

Rather, the glory is He does more than He promised, all by His **grace**.

The big deal is that God has done & is doing far more than He had revealed in the OT because He loves to show His grace.

He had hinted at it in verses like Isaiah 49:6 in saying His Servant would bring salvation to the end of the earth, if you recall that phrase.

God said it was too small to keep His glory only within Israel.

In Isaiah 49:6, "*He says, "It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will **also** make You a light of the nations So that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth."*"

Since God's Servant Jesus is too great to keep His salvation & glory in Israel only, He had to spread His grace to others **also**.

So Jesus said in Acts 1:8, "*You will be My witnesses both in Jerusalem & all Judea & Samaria, & even to the remotest part of the earth."*

That phrase *the remotest part of the earth* in Acts 1:8 is the same as *the end of the earth*—in Isaiah 49:6.

Jesus said His plan was for His witnesses to reach the end of the earth.

So the big deal about the Gentiles is that Jesus was going above & beyond in His GRACE to spread His glory to reach them.

Do you see that?—first, do you see how we as Gentiles are foreign to gaining the rights of the ethnic heirs & citizens of Israel?

Then do you see how grateful we should be that God's grace has overflowed the boundaries of Israel to reach the nations?

Not only did we not deserve God's love because of our sins, but we were also outside of the families to which those promises came.

So the big deal about the Gentiles is God's abundant grace.

The big deal is the praise of the glory of God's grace as in Ephesians 1

God sent the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the nations because He loves to show grace & salvation is only & always by grace.

Most Jews in Jesus' time missed the fact that they needed God's grace.

And most Jews also disdained Gentiles as separated from God's promises & did not want Gentiles to receive any grace.

So that brings us back to Joppa where Peter was at the end of Acts 9.

Joppa was where Jonah fled to avoid preaching to Gentiles.

And Jonah 4:2-3 shows typical hatred for Gentiles as he became angry with God's mercy to Nineveh & told God, "*was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious & compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity. Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life.*"

Think of that—think of someone mad that you received grace.

Think of that related to what Peter did in Acts 10 going to the Gentiles.

That's why Acts 11:2-3 says, "*when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those who were circumcised took issue with him, saying, 'You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them.'*"

So get that context in Acts 10—most Jews would not eat with Gentiles because the Gentiles were considered unclean ceremonially.

And being unclean meant you could not approach God rightly.

But as Jesus implied in Mark 7:19 & showed in Acts 10, God declared all foods clean & thereby declared Gentiles no longer unclean.

We'll get into the narrative of Acts 10 & more about OT food laws & NT freedom, but for today, let's just answer one more question that connects with answers to the 1st question.

Question #2—what's the big deal about the mystery?

I trust you see the big deal about the Gentiles was God's grace.

Now let's answer question #2—what's the big deal about the mystery?

The word mystery is not used in Acts 10-11, but the narrative begins to unveil the mystery that extends the big deal of the Gentiles receiving grace.

And by mystery, I mean something that was not revealed before.

A mystery in the NT is something that was not revealed fully beforehand in the OT, but now has been revealed in the NT.

The narrative begins to unveil the mystery that the Gentiles would receive salvation & the Spirit in the same way as the Jews.

Turn back to Acts 10 & read of that in Acts 10:44-48. [READ]

Notice the comparative language—in verse 45, the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles ALSO.

Verse 47: the Gentiles received the Holy Spirit just as we did.

In other words, they were made alive by the Spirit just as Jews were.

They were confirmed by the same miraculous sign.

As Acts 11:1 says, it was confirmation that "*the Gentiles also had received the Word of God.*"

Then look again at Acts 11:15-18. [READ]

The unmistakable conclusion was that God had given the Gentiles the Holy Spirit in the same way He had with the Jews.

The Holy Spirit was given to both Jews & Gentiles after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ.

God had granted the Gentiles ALSO the repentance that leads to life.

That's the big deal about the mystery—the mystery was that Jews & Gentiles would experience the same salvation in the same way with the same proof.

The mystery was that the Gentiles would have the same repentance into the same life by the same faith in the same Lord Jesus Christ.

In other words, the mystery was that Jewish & Gentile believers in Jesus would be treated the same way by God.

Gentile believers did not need to be circumcised or ceremonially clean & learn to only approach God through His laws for national Israel.

The way to approach God was no longer through that One nation because their Messiah had come to reach the nations.

No longer were the nations to look to Israel for God to reveal Himself & to await His Promised Savior from Israel.

That Promised Savior had come & He was being proclaimed as Lord & Christ beyond the national & ethnic borders of Israel.

So the big deal about the mystery is unity—that Gentile believers in Jesus are now united with Jewish believers in one new body.

That mystery begins to be unveiled in Acts 10 & it's affirmed in Acts 11 & affirmed again in Acts 15 at a Jerusalem Council.

Yet Galatians 2 reports that even Peter needed to be reminded of that unity later because he was refusing to eat with Gentile believers.

So when I say Acts 10 **begins** to unveil that mystery, it was only a beginning of a massive shift that took time to take root.

That's why we read of this huge transition being worked out in the history of Acts & in the NT letters like those I've quoted from already.

This required new revelation, new light to explain it & answer the questions & objections & applications that would arise.

So let's turn to Ephesians 3 to see this term mystery defined as Paul later wrote about it around the same time Luke was writing Acts.

Follow along as I read Ephesians 3:1-12. [READ]

That's the mystery in verse 6, "*the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.*"

So the big deal about the mystery is rooted in the big deal about the Gentiles—that they receive grace that gives unity—that God gave more so bring more together as one.

All the spiritual blessings in God's promises to Israel in the New Covenant are applied to Gentiles also as equal, unified partners.

The marvel of God's eternal purpose in Christ Jesus our Lord, as verses 10-11 say, shows the manifold wisdom of God through the church even to those in the heavenly places.

This mystery was *hidden in God*, as verse 9 says, but was made known to Paul & revealed to Christ's apostles & prophets, as verses 3, 5 say.

That's the big deal about the mystery—it's grace-based unity.

Romans 11:25 says part of that mystery is that "*a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.*"

God had hidden that He would bring the time of the Gentiles when He brings people to Himself through the church rather than through Israel as a nation, but He does it all by His grace.

Again, He is not finished with Israel yet.

As Romans 9:6 says, His Word to them has not failed.

But the wonder of Acts 10 is that it begins to unveil this mystery of Gentile believers being made one—unified—with Jewish believers.

And since God is now making known His wisdom through the church, then the church should look different from the world.

Just as God told Israel to be distinctly separate from the other nations, so the church should be different from the world & holy to Him.

To show the world a different way—the true way to God—we need to show them a unified, different path & set of priorities.

We are to display the true God & not all the same idols of the world.

One way we can be different is by being unified in Christ, by guarding the unity we have in the truths that matter the most & being humble toward each other because all we have is grace.

So let's look at Ephesians 2:11-22 & read words describing the big deal about the mystery & the Gentiles. [READ]

That describes you if you are in Christ.

How marvelous! How precious to be near by the blood of Christ!

Jesus died to pay sin's penalty for all who trust Him—His body suffering in our place; His life poured out in blood for us.

He conquered the sin that separated us from God & from each other.

So it's fitting now to recall our oneness in Christ together as we remember Him in the family meal at the Lord's Table.

The dividing wall between Jews & Gentiles has been torn down to be together in one body in Christ & nothing should hinder that oneness.

As we come to remember Jesus' work in communion, confess anything that hinders your fellowship with Him & His church.

Examine relationships in the body & honor Jesus' body & blood given for us to be reconciled to Him & to one another.

If you do not know Him, we urge you to watch this ceremony & pray for His grace to be poured out on you to save you.

But if you do know Him, we welcome you to remember Him with us.

Pray with me as we prepare to remember Him in a fitting way.