

Acts of the Apostles  
Week 5 Summary  
Acts 9:32–11:30

Luke, having introduced Saul's conversion and ministry prowess, now turns back to Peter's ministry. Luke's focus in this section is on how the gospel moves from Jews, to half-Jews (Samaritans), to Gentiles. The scene opens on a Gentile named Cornelius who is a centurion. Luke tells us he is a God-fearer, generous in charity, and prayed continually. Luke points out it was the ninth hour which harkens back to Peter and John going up to the temple at that hour to pray. Based on what we have been told about Cornelius, we may assume he was praying when he received a vision of an Angel telling him to go and find Peter (disclosing where Peter was staying). We are reminded, again, by Luke that prayer is the context for revelation. Cornelius obeys sending men right away.

Meanwhile, the next day, the Lord is preparing Peter for this momentous occasion. Peter, too, is praying, although later in the day. He becomes hungry, asks for food, and while he waits he falls into a trance about food. In his vision he sees a sheet with a mix of clean and unclean animals and hears a voice tell him to rise, kill, and eat. Peter refuses pointing out the uncleanness of the animals, but God declares he has made them clean. The scene or demand is repeated three times giving the scene weight and importance.

While Peter is considering the significance of his vision the men from Cornelius arrive. Peter is instructed by the Spirit to go with them without hesitation. So he does after giving them hospitality in the house of food and lodging for the night.

Peter arrives at Cornelius' home and finds a crowd of friends and family assembled. Cornelius explains his vision to Peter and lets Peter know that he and his are ready to receive from Peter what the Lord has commanded him. Thus Peter begins with his own new insight that God does not show favoritism but accepts a person from any nation (thus food is both clean and Gentiles are acceptable to God). He then launches into a rehearsal of the gospel and before he can finish his sermon Cornelius and those assembled have their own share in Pentecost, which Peter interprets as God accepting these into his family. This leads to the group being baptized with water in the name of Jesus.

When Peter gets home he is confronted by the circumcision as to why he fellowshiped with uncircumcised—non-Jewish—people. Peter rehearses his experience on the rooftop and give the insight he received which led to this innovation. He then proceeds to related how the Holy Spirit fell on those people tying that baptism of the Spirit with the same promise Jesus had made to the Jews. The people are amazed and begin to glorify God that he had even brought life to the Gentiles.

This event inspires the further penetration of the gospel into the Gentile world. Believers in the dispersion from the persecution begin to preach to the Greeks as well as to the Jews. That ministry is successful so the mother church sends Barnabas to check it out. Barnabas encourages the ministry which continues to grow requiring more leadership so he brings in Saul to help. Saul and Barnabas take on a connecting role between the new ministry and the mother church through the collection for famine relief.

*Faithful Presence*  
"Chapter Three"

1. On page 51 Fitch writes, "If we can recognize his presence at work around the table, we will be able to recognize his work in the rest of our lives as well." Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not? Are there any dangers to this approach?
2. Fitch notes that the Lord's Table proper is reserved for the close circle (p.64). His congregation is more intentional in being aware of this space during communion on the 1st Sunday of the month (they celebrate table weekly). Are there any parallels with Northview's bi-monthly "Let's Do Lunch"?
3. Table fellowship as featured in Scripture can have religious significance in specific cases (a Passover meal for e.g.) or cultural significance generally in contrast to North American culture. How does this affect our ability to fully enter God's presence around a table? Is there something we can learn from our African brothers and sisters here among us?