

# Empowered

The Amazing Church of Jesus Christ

## Week 5

*The Gospel Goes to the Gentiles*

**Acts 10:1 – 12:25**

*Teacher Notes*

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*Bible versions used throughout the Empowered teacher notes are  
NASB, ESV, NLT, and CEB.*

## ✧ Introduction to Week Five

**ILLUSTRATION:** For a Christian parent one of the most precious events that can happen is when a child puts his or her faith in Jesus. Hearts soar as their child is baptized, telling the world publicly that he is a Jesus follower. A time to celebrate the most important decision a person will ever make!

- This week we will see the church grow. Ordinary people, like you and me—responding to the gospel with great joy and trust in Jesus—are compelled to be baptized.
- Before we begin in Acts 10, let’s look back to Acts 9:31. Here we get a clear picture of the status of the church at that time:
  - ✦ Acts 9:31 *“So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase.”*
- We learn two things about the church at that time:
  1. The church was enjoying peace, being built up, and growing larger and stronger.
  2. How? In the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit.
- The church was edified by being taught, educated, and instructed in God’s Word. They were growing in their faith.
- ⇒ **These new believers were God fearers and were going forth in the comfort of the Holy Spirit.**
  - ~ They now had a knowledge of God and understood He cared about their actions, their words, and deeds—how they chose to *live* their lives.
  - ~ They had a heart that wanted to please God, and desired to live in obedience to His Word.
- ▲ **QUOTE:** Oswald Chambers— *“The remarkable thing about God is that when you fear God, you fear nothing else, whereas if you do not fear God, you fear everything else.”*
- ⇒ **The church was growing and expanding. As we learned last week, the flame had been lit—and it would continue to burn bright in the hearts of those who heard the gospel message and believed in faith for salvation.**

**TEACHING TIP:** What does it mean to be a God fearer? It is a person who has a healthy and appropriate reverence for God and His holiness.

## Study One:

### Acts 10:1-23      A Vision from Heaven

- There was a problem within the church concerning the interactions between Jewish believers and Gentile believers.

**TEACHING TIP:** What was at the core of the problem that impacted unity in the church?

1. Jews did not like Gentiles.
2. Gentiles did not like Jews.
3. They did not associate with each other.
4. They did not visit in each other's homes.
5. They did not share meals together.

⇒ **Their relationship was adversarial, in that they treated each other like enemies.**

- Peter also, even as a leader in the church, had a problem interacting with Gentiles.
- **NOTE:** Up to this point in the story of God, everyone outside of the chosen race, Israel, had been left out of the family of God, and out of the story of God. Totally excluded.
- But Isaiah 43:19 had prophesied God's 'family' plan— *"See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland."*

**TEACHING TIP:** It had always been the plan of God, from the very beginning of time, to bring Gentiles into HIS family. We can go back to Genesis, the first book of the Bible, to see God's plan. In Genesis 17 God made a covenant with Abraham—in it He promised (foretold) the Messiah who would be a blessing to ALL the families of the whole world. Jesus was the promised Messiah. Gentiles are part of 'all' the families of the world.

- Before a shift of understanding could take place in the church, however, Peter had to have a great shift in his perspective.
- ▲ **QUOTE:** R. Kent Hughes in his commentary on Acts— *"Peter had bound all the peoples of the world, except his own race, into one loathsome bundle. God used a vision to bring a radical change in the attitude of the leading apostle of the early church, and it was a good thing he did. Otherwise, Christianity would have been reduced to a narrow sect of Judaism, and you and I would have never heard the good news."*
- ⇒ **God's plan was unfolding. Gentiles were being redeemed and brought into the family of God.**
- God revealed His plan for the Gentiles in two separate visions.
  1. First vision to a man named Cornelius.
  2. Second vision to Peter.

- In Acts 10:1-2 we are introduced to a man name Cornelius.
  - ~ He was a Roman centurion and a Gentile.
  - ~ He was stationed and living in Caesarea, a city on the coast about thirty-five miles north of Joppa.
  - ~ He was a devout man who feared God.
  - ~ He was also a generous man who gave alms to the poor. He cared for others.
  - ~ He was a man of prayer—he prayed to God continually.
- Cornelius’ story is incredible and related to us in Acts 10:3-8.
  - ~ On a certain day, around three in the afternoon, he experienced a vision. An angel of God appeared and called him by name. This was obviously alarming to him.
  - ~ The angel told him that God had been paying attention to his life and had heard his prayers and had seen his generosity with the people.
  - ~ The angel then instructed him to send some of his men to Joppa and find a man named Simon Peter who was staying with a tanner (also called Simon) by the sea.
  - ~ The angel told him that this Peter would come to him and deliver a message that God had for Cornelius.
- Cornelius did exactly as the angel had instructed. Having been given the details of their quest, two of his servants and a soldier traveled thirty-five miles to Joppa to find Peter.
- Meanwhile in Joppa, Peter went up to the patio on the roof of the tanner’s house to pray.
  - ~ This occurred around noon, lunchtime; Peter became very hungry.
  - ~ Preparations for lunch were being made when Peter fell into a trance.
- In Acts 10:11-16 Peter had a vision while in the trance.
  - ~ He saw something being let down from the sky—it resembled a sheet and on it were many animals.
  - ~ These animals included all kinds of four-footed animals, crawling creatures of the earth, and birds of the air—all of which were considered (by Jews) to be unclean.
  - ~ Peter heard a voice that told him to kill the animals and have them for food.
  - ~ Because of his Jewish heritage, Peter responded, *“By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean.”* (Acts 10:14)
  - ~ God spoke again— *“What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy.”* (Acts 10:15)
  - ~ This interchange between Peter and God happened three times; then the object (like a sheet) was taken from Peter’s sight.

**TEACHING TIP:** It is evident that Cornelius was a good man who did good things. But it is important to point out that he did not know Jesus at this point in his story. He did not have the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit.

**TEACHING TIP:** Leviticus 11 gives the details as to what foods Jews were permitted to eat and what foods they were not.

→ **NOTE:** At this point, Peter could have thought the vision was addressing dietary restrictions.

- Peter was perplexed. He was confused, baffled as to what the vision meant. But God had a specific meaning for this vision that had everything to do with the family of God.
- As he was considering the vision, the Spirit told Peter that three men were looking for him and he was to accompany them without any reservations because God Himself had sent them—and a knock on the door was heard, the men from Caesarea had arrived.

→ **NOTE:** Stop for a moment to consider what has happened in this scene. Peter had gone to the roof to pray. God revealed to Peter in a vision exactly what was about to happen and how he was to respond—three men are at the door looking for you, go with them in confidence because I have sent them to you. But wait—these men were Gentiles!

**TEACHING TIP:** Peter’s life was being interrupted—not only his possible plans for the day but his comfort zone for ministry.

**QUOTE: Dietrich Bonhoeffer—**  
*“We must allow ourselves to be interrupted by God.”*

⇒ **God invited Peter into His story, to play a part that God had hand selected for Peter. And Peter listened and obeyed.**

✠ John 10:27 *“My sheep listen to My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me ...”*

**APPLICATION:** Have you ever found God interrupting your day? You have a full calendar but sense the Spirit calling you to a different plan for the moment or even for the day. How have you responded to the Spirit’s prompting—in obedience or with rationalizations as to why you can’t ...

- ~ Make a call or send a text to check in on someone letting them know you care for them and are praying for them.
- ~ Stop to pray with someone instead of assuring them that you will pray for them (later).

Remember: Peter was in a state of prayer, seeking God when the Spirit led him. We need to be in the Word of God, seeking God in prayer, listening for His voice and willing to follow His lead.

⇒ **God is calling us to participate in His story. Many are familiar with the acronym FOMO (fear of missing out)—let’s NOT miss out on all that God has planned for our individual lives!**

- In Acts 10:22 the three men explained why they had come:
  - ~ Cornelius (a Gentile well-spoken of by the entire nation of the Jews) had been directed by a holy angel to send for Peter to come to his home.
  - ~ Cornelius had been told that he would hear a message from Peter.

**TEACHING TIP:** Do you think Peter was beginning to understand what God was asking of him? Do you think he remembered God’s words in his vision—*what God had cleansed, no longer consider unholy?*

⇒ **Peter’s message would be the gospel of Jesus Christ—a salvation message extended for the first time to Gentiles offering grace, forgiveness, and redemption.**

## Study Two:

### **Acts 10:23b-48    The Gentile Pentecost**

- The next day Peter left Joppa, headed to the home of Cornelius. He was accompanied by the three men from Caesarea and some fellow believers from Joppa.

⇒ **Peter obeyed God and did exactly what God asked him to do.**

**TEACHING TIP:** Peter knew that God was leading him, that God was at work. God is always at work in our lives. The words of the worship song “Way Maker” ring true— *“Even when I don’t see it, You’re working; even when I don’t feel it, You’re working. You never stop working ... Way Maker, Miracle Worker, Promise Keeper, Light in the darkness. My God that is who You are!”*

⇒ **With confidence we can know that God keeps His promises and is always at work in our own personal stories.**

- As Peter arrived, a crowd of Cornelius’ family and friends had formed in his home to welcome Peter to Caesarea. (Acts 10:24)

- When Peter entered his home, Cornelius fell down to worship Peter! Immediately, Peter told Cornelius to stand up, stating that he (Peter) was only a man himself.

**TEACHING TIP:** There is only One worthy of our worship— Jesus Christ.

→ **NOTE:** Peter had a captive audience. The stage was set with Cornelius and the crowd; they were anxiously awaiting to hear Peter’s message.

⇒ **The Holy Spirit was about to do a brand-new thing that would change history forever!**

- Peter began by reminding them that it was unlawful for him, as a Jew, to associate or visit a foreigner (which was Cornelius), and then Peter made an incredible shift—he shared that God had told him that he “should not call any man unholy or unclean.”
- In Acts 10:34-35 Peter stated that he now understood God’s vision—God was not One to show partiality, that any man from any nation who feared Him and did what was right in His eyes was welcomed to Him.
- Peter continued with a message of salvation in Acts 10:36-43.

~ He shared about the life of Jesus and all that He had done while on earth.

- \* Relating Jesus’ baptism by John the Baptist.
- \* Describing how Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit—doing good and healing those oppressed by the devil.

**TEACHING TIP:** Put yourself in that room. The door to salvation was being swung wide open!

- ~ He shared that he had been an eyewitness to Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.
- \* How Jesus had paid for every sin for all of mankind by His death on the cross.
- \* How God had raised Jesus from the dead on the third day.
- \* How the resurrected Jesus had appeared to many, including the disciples who ate and drank with them after he rose from the dead.

→ **NOTE:** Peter made it clear that he had been an eyewitness to all these things.

- ~ He shared Jesus' command to preach and testify to who He was and is—and that through His name everyone who believed in Him would receive forgiveness of sins.
- While Peter was speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon the people who were listening and believing in the name of Jesus ... Gentiles! Hearts were exploding in faith in Jesus Christ.
- Peter's companions, Jewish believers, stood amazed as they witnessed these Gentiles receive the Holy Spirit. They saw this with their own eyes; this movement of God could not be denied.
- Just like on the day of Pentecost (Acts 1), the people began to exalt God in different tongues and in great joy. Peter ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus (an outward sign of inward cleansing).

⇒ **Salvation had come to the home of Cornelius. Salvation had come to the Gentiles!**

**TEACHING TIP:** Stop and consider for a moment what this meant to the Gentiles and to the Jewish believers who witnessed this event. They realized that—

- ~ Gentiles were now included in the family of God.
- ~ Gentiles were no longer outcasts to be separated from the family of God.
- ~ Gentile and Jewish believers were now brothers and sisters in Christ.

⇒ **The story of Cornelius began to spread all throughout Judea—all the way to the church in Jerusalem.**

## Study Three:

### **Acts 11:1-18      The Church's Confirmation**

→ **NOTE:** One would have thought that the church in Jerusalem would have been excited, rejoicing over the news coming from Caesarea but that was not the case. Why? The new converts were Gentiles!

- Peter arrived in Jerusalem. Jewish believers, even the apostles, had questions for him—they wanted an explanation because (in their world) it was shocking to hear that God had granted repentance to the Gentiles.

**TEACHING TIP:** It is important to remember that religious and cultural walls were being torn down with all believers becoming one in Christ.

- Peter described the two visions that had occurred for he and Cornelius. He further explained the separate instructions given to them—
    - ~ God clearly had directed Peter to go (without misgivings) to the home of Cornelius.
    - ~ An angel of the Lord had directed Cornelius to send for Peter who would have a message for him.
  - In Acts 11:15 Peter shared, *“And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as He did upon us at the beginning.”*
    - ~ Just as the Holy Spirit was poured out on Peter and those listening on the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out on these Gentiles in Cornelius’ home.
  - In Acts 11:17 Peter asked these Jewish believers (some being leaders in the early church), *“Therefore if God gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God’s way?”*
- **NOTE:** What a question?! Who are we to stand in God’s way, in His plans?!
- Peter’s question first elicited silence and then these believers in Jerusalem began to glorify God, praising Him for granting to Gentiles the repentance that leads to life.

**TEACHING TIP:** God had a different plan than these Jewish believers could ever have imagined. In Genesis God promised the inclusion of all nations in the covenant He made with Abraham. The apostle John shares a similar picture in the Book of Revelation.

✠ **Revelation 7:9** *“After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all the tribes, peoples, and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands ...”*

- ⇒ **Here we see Jesus’ call to His disciples in Acts 1:8 being obeyed and producing results they had never imagined. The church was opening its doors to all peoples, all nations! Salvation through Jesus was not limited to the Jews.**

## Study Four:

### **Acts 11:19-12:5 The Gospel Goes to Antioch**

- In earlier weeks, we learned that, after the death of Stephen, persecution toward the church increased and believers scattered to get out of harm’s way. Many made their way to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch.
- In Acts 11:20 we are introduced to some men who came into Antioch.
  - ~ We were not told WHO they were; no names were provided.

**TEACHING TIP:** Those scattered preached the gospel only to Jews in their new cities.



- ~ We were told WHERE they were from, the island of Cyprus and from Cyrene (a Greek city on the north of the African coast).
- ~ These men were eager to preach the Lord Jesus.

**TEACHING TIP:** Some background regarding the city of Antioch will help.

- ~ It was the third largest city in the world at the time, behind Rome and Alexandria.
- ~ The people worshiped the pagan goddess, Daphne.
- ~ The Temple of Daphne was known for its sensuality and depravity. Temple prostitutes encouraged a life of pleasure and sensuality.

- Whereas the Jewish believers were sharing Jesus Christ only with Jews, the men from Cyprus and Cyrene entered this pagan landscape of Antioch and began to preach Jesus to the Greeks, as well as the Jews.

**ILLUSTRATION:** Like these men from Cyprus and Cyrene, A.W. Tozer was an American pastor and author who had a zealous passion for Jesus. He was born into poverty in 1897 in Newberg, Pennsylvania. Tozer was a highly intelligent man, self-educated through high school and college.

His life was completely transformed by the grace of God in Jesus. One day, as he walked home from work, he heard a street preacher say, “If you don’t know how to be saved, just call on God saying, ‘Lord, be merciful to me a sinner.’” At home he climbed into the attic, got alone with God, and followed the preacher’s instructions. Tozer said that this launched him into a lifelong pursuit of God.

Five years later, without any formal theological training, he began to pastor his first church. This began forty-four years of serving as a pastor to a number of American churches. He wrote more than sixty books, mostly compiled from his brilliant sermons.

- ▲ **QUOTE:** In *The Knowledge of the Holy* A.W. Tozer stated— “*What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.*”

**APPLICATION:** Isn’t that true? What we think about God entirely informs our lives—how we live, how we love, how we serve. Who God is to us impacts every decision we will ever make.

In the introduction of Tozer’s book entitled *The Pursuit of God*, he said, “*This book is a modest attempt to aid God’s hungry children so to find him. Others before me have gone farther into the holy mysteries than I have done but if my fire is not large it is yet very real, and there may be those who can light their candle at its flame.*”

⇒ **May we have a passion for Christ that is ‘on fire’ for Jesus and lights a fire in others to see their need for Him. Just as these men from Cyprus and Cyrene.**

- In Acts 11:21 we are told that the hand of God was on these ‘new men in town’ who were preaching Jesus and that many people in Antioch believed and turned to the Lord.

- **NOTE:** These men had a bold confidence rooted in God and empowered by the Holy Spirit. They were a conduit of grace, faith, and obedience to the people in Antioch.
- ⇒ **The flame of the gospel had reached Antioch and lives were being changed. People were turning away from the depravity and spiritual darkness in this city.**
- The news spread about what was happening in Antioch. The church in Jerusalem took notice of the events taking place there, but this time the news was received with excitement.
  - The church sent Barnabas, a man's whose name meant 'encourager.' When he arrived, he witnessed the grace of God and rejoiced and immediately began to encourage these new believers.
  - Acts 11:24 describes Barnabas as a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. From that heart he—
  - ✚ Acts 11:24c *"...began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord."*
  - Barnabas left for a brief time to find Saul in Tarsus. Saul returned with him and assisted Barnabas in meeting with these new believers, teaching them and helping them grow in their faith.
  - Barnabas and Saul remained in Antioch for a year.

**TEACHING TIP:** Acts 11:23c is the first time "grace" is used in reference to salvation.

**TEACHING TIP:** "Remain true to the Lord"—what a word for us today!

**TEACHING TIP:** In Antioch the believers were given a Greek nickname. The Greek word for Messiah is "Christ."

⇒ **It is here in Antioch that believers were for the first time in history called 'Christians.'**

## Study Five:

### **Acts 12:6-25      A Miraculous Escape**

- Our attention will turn back to Peter in this chapter with persecution continuing under King Herod.
- At this point King Herod had been mistreating those who belonged to the church, even putting to death James, the brother of John.
- When King Herod saw that the death of James pleased the Jews, he put Peter into prison—with the plan to bring Peter out after Passover and putting him to death.
  - ~ His thought was Peter's death would please the Jews even more.

**TEACHING TIP:** A few facts about King Herod—

- ~ The grandson of Herod the Great who called for the murder of innocent baby boys at the birth of Jesus.
- ~ His uncle was the King Herod Agrippa who participated in the sentencing of Jesus to death on the cross.
- ~ His family had a heritage of evil intent and murder.
- ⇒ **Not surprising that we find this King Herod persecuting Christians and taking their lives, as well.**
- ~ Popularity seemed to be a driving force, making him willing to do about anything if it would improve his 'ratings' among the people.
- ~ One commentary stated that when Herod was with Romans he acted like a Roman, when with Jews he acted like a Jew (interestingly, he was professedly a proselyte to the Jewish faith). He was Jewish by race, but not by faith.

⇒ **The very night King Herod planned to kill Peter, God had a different plan for Peter because it was not Peter's time to die.**

- Peter was well-guarded in his imprisonment—bound in chains and slept between two guards and there were also guards standing outside the door of his cell. King Herod ensured there was no way for Peter to escape. (Acts 12:6)

**TEACHING TIP:** Believers were praying for him during this time. (Acts 12:12)

- ~ In Acts 12:7-17 Peter's miraculous escape from prison and death were told:
- ~ An angel suddenly appeared, light shone in the dark cell, and the angel struck Peter's side to awaken him.
- ~ The angel instructed him to get up quickly, and his chains fell off his hands.
- ~ The angel further instructed Peter to get dressed and to wrap his cloak around himself.
- ~ Then the angel told Peter to follow him. Peter questioned what was happening. Was he dreaming or was it real?
- ~ They walked past guards and the iron gate leading to the city opened for them by itself!
- ~ The angel disappeared as they walked into the city.
- ~ Peter found himself alone with the realization that this was no dream! God had sent an angel to rescue him from the murderous plans of King Herod.
- ~ He briefly met with those who had been praying for him—they were amazed!

**TEACHING TIP:** It is striking to note that the guards protecting Peter never heard a sound, never saw the light in the cell.

⇒ **Undaunted, Peter continued his mission to share the gospel with his eyes fixed on Jesus, empowered by the Holy Spirit.**

**TEACHING TIP:** King Herod failed in trying to stop the plans of our unstoppable God!

→ **NOTE:** In all of this, Herod could not find Peter, nor could he explain Peter’s disappearance! One would think that these events would somewhat humble Herod.

- After executing the guards who could not find Peter, King Herod went to Caesarea. And there they people referred to him as “a god and not a man.” (Acts 12:22). Immediately an angel of the Lord struck King Herod, and he was devoured by worms.

**TEACHING TIP:** King Herod accepted this “glory” from the people. A glory due to God alone.

- King Herod had stood in opposition to Jesus and His gospel, so a great judgment fell upon him. To his last breath, King Herod refused to give God the glory.

⇒ **And the church kept growing, empowered by the Holy Spirit— “But the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied.” (Acts 12:24)**

**TEACHING TIP:** Lessons from Peter –

- (1) He trusted God’s plan even when he did not fully understand.
- (2) He saw God’s miracles to make a way when there seemed to be no way.
- (3) He gave his life away to Jesus Christ and shared the good news of Him with everyone he met.

✠ Isaiah 26:8 *“Indeed, while following the way of Your judgments, LORD, we have waited for You eagerly; Your name, and remembering You, is the desire of our souls.”*

## ✠ FINAL THOUGHTS

**ILLUSTRATION:** On December 31, 2019, approximately sixty-five thousand college students met in Mercedes Benz Stadium in Atlanta, Georgia. They rang in the New Year lifting high the name of Jesus. The stadium opened its roof at midnight and the sound of voices singing, praising the name of Jesus could be heard through the streets of Atlanta. Amazing to witness college students, by their attendance, stating that there was nothing more important to them than to ring in the new year, the new decade, worshiping Jesus.

Their anthem for the conference was Isaiah 26:8— *“Indeed, while following the way of Your judgements, Lord, we have waited for you eagerly; Your name, and remembering You, is the desire of our souls.”*

Committed to carry the light of Christ onto their campuses. Committed to share their personal stories, their testimonies. Committed to make a difference for the name of Jesus Christ.

God is still at work, growing His church.

✠ **Peter trusted God’s plan, even when he didn’t fully understand it.**

- ⚙ What about you? Do you trust God even when His plan for you isn’t completely clear?

- ✦ **Peter saw the miracles and ministry of Jesus first-hand; and it forever changed the trajectory of his life.**
  - ⚙ Has Jesus changed the direction of your life through a relationship with Him?
  
- ✦ **Peter gave his life away to make the Good News known because he knew that there was no decision in the world more important than knowing Jesus and following Him, the Creator and God of the Universe.**
  - ⚙ Have you given your life away as Peter did? Can others see Jesus in your life as you seek to follow Him daily?
  
- ✦ **Peter was an amazing leader in the church. He was empowered by the Holy Spirit to follow the calling and plans God had for his life. Peter knew he could not accomplish God's plan in his own strength--God's Spirit would guide and direct him to lead a life pleasing to God, a life that pointed others to faith in Jesus.**
  
- ✦ **Like Peter, we have the same power living within us, the Holy Spirit! May the sharing of Jesus' name be the desire of our hearts.**