

Acts 062  
Gentile Salvation – Part 7  
Acts 11:1-10  
January 8, 2025  
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Please open your Bibles to Acts 11. We are continuing our verse-by-verse study through the *Book of Acts*. We have just come out of Acts 10, which is a really monumental leap forward in the development of the church where you have the first Gentile salvation in the Church Age—a man named Cornelius is saved and his entourage there in Caesarea.

There are a lot of details in Acts 10 explaining this. Before he was saved, Cornelius had a vision that someone was coming, and then God dealt with Peter in a vision. And through a lot of different events, God orchestrated Peter and others to travel from Joppa to Caesarea. It was there that Peter entered the home of a Gentile, which you did not do as a Jew. There was Cornelius and his entourage—his family—waiting for Peter. They were sitting on the edge of their seats wondering what Peter was going to say. Peter preached the gospel of Jesus Christ, and he could not even get the sermon out of his mouth before Cornelius and his family said, "That is enough! We have heard enough." They believed on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and for the very first time, you have a convert in Christianity, in the Church Age, who is non-Jewish—who is a full-fledged Gentile.

The converts in Acts 2 were all Jewish. The converts in Acts 8 were half-breeds, whom we call the Samaritans—partly Jewish, partly Babylonian. There have been Gentile converts in the sense that they were proselytes, like the Ethiopian eunuch, for example. But this is the first time a proselyte would be someone that was a convert to Judaism as a Gentile. But this is the first time we have had a full-fledged conversion of an uncircumcised Gentile, Cornelius.

We went through all of that information in Acts 10, and now we are looking at Acts 11:1-18. What happens now is that Peter, who was north in Caesarea where this conversion happens, now has to travel southeast, back to Jerusalem to explain to the leadership of the church that it is really true that a Gentile got saved. The Jewish leadership of the church (located in Jerusalem at that time) did not think a Gentile salvation was possible.

It is kind of interesting as you get to the beginning of the Church Age, that the church, being primarily composed of Jews, did not think a Gentile could get saved. Now, compare that to us at the end of the Church Age. We are primarily Gentiles, and we do not think a Jew could get saved. It is as if they are saying, "I do not think that a Gentile could get saved." And God says, "Watch Me." And here we are at the end of the Church Age, with most churches having written off the

nation of Israel as unreachable. And God is going to say, "Watch Me. You are going to see a whole nation get saved post-Rapture." So do not throw too many stones against the Jewish leadership, because we are kind of the same way a lot of times as Gentiles.

Peter's defense in Jerusalem is going to have three parts. There are charges that are going to be brought against Peter (Acts 11:1-3). Peter gives his defense to this leadership in Jerusalem—that a Gentile got saved, and he gives his explanation (Acts 11:4-17). His explanation is so compelling that they reach a verdict in Acts 11:18, and they say, "Gentiles can get saved in the Church Age, and let us preach the gospel to the Gentiles. And who are we to stand in the way of God?" They go from being very hostile—very suspicious—toward Peter at first, to the opposite direction. They quit bickering; they become accommodating; and they embrace Gentile salvation—which is a good thing, because here we are primarily as Gentiles in salvation 2000 years later.

This is what we would call the first Jerusalem Council. Peter travels from Caesarea back to Jerusalem, and he has to explain to the leadership that Cornelius' salvation was real. I bring that up because a lot of people look at Acts 15 as the first Jerusalem Council. In reality, Acts 15 is not the first Jerusalem Council, it is the second Jerusalem Council. Acts 15, which is a council meeting after Paul comes back from his first missionary journey, is dealing with a different issue. The issue in Acts 15 is: "We have all these Gentiles who are saved now. Do we make these Gentiles convert to Judaism in order to join the church?" That is what they are trying to figure out in Acts 15. That is not the issue in Acts 11—the first Jerusalem council. The issue in Acts 11 is: can a Gentile get saved at all? Acts 11 is a soteriological issue. Acts 15 is an ecclesiological issue. Acts 11 is: can a Gentile get saved? Acts 15 is: we know that Gentiles can get saved, but do they have to become Jews to join the church? I just bring that to your attention, because a lot of people think Acts 15 is the first Jerusalem Council. It is not. It is the second Jerusalem Council. What we are reading about here is the first Jerusalem Council.

Charges are brought against Peter by the Christian leadership in Jerusalem (Acts 11:1-3); Peter defends himself (Acts 11:4-17); and then the leadership reaches a positive verdict for Gentile salvation (Acts 11:18). Notice, first of all, the charges that are brought against Peter. We have groups that heard about Cornelius' salvation in Acts 11:1, there is the occasion for the charge in Acts 11:2, and an accusation is made against Peter in Acts 11:3.

Notice, the groups that heard of the conversion of Cornelius in Caesarea. The apostles and the brethren heard about it. Acts 11:1 says, *"Now the apostles and the brethren who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God."* The first group that heard about this was the rest of the apostles. The second group that heard of Cornelius' salvation was the brethren. The brethren would have been Jewish (Hebrew) brothers in Christ.

Notice this expression, *received*. "*We heard that a Gentile received the word of God.*" *Received* is used as a synonym for *believe* in Scripture. A synonym, of course, is a different word with the same meaning. For example, in John 1:12 it says, "*But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name.*" Notice that *receive* and *believe* are used as synonyms there. I bring this up because a lot of people say, "You have to do multiple steps to come to Christ. The text is two steps. Number one, you have to receive; and number two, you have to believe." That is a false dichotomy because the two are synonymous. To receive Christ is just another way of saying "believed in Christ." The primary word that is used for the lost sinner to come to Christ is to *believe*; but sometimes a few synonyms are tossed in, like *repent* (which means *change of mind*). You do not take those as additional steps—God only requires one step for justification—you just look at those as synonymous.

The apostles and the brethren heard about Cornelius' salvation; and this leads to the occasion for an accusation against Peter, who led Cornelius to Christ in Caesarea. It says in Acts 11:2, "*And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those who were circumcised took issue with him.*" Notice that Peter came up to Jerusalem, and that fits perfectly with everything we know about the city of Jerusalem. When you are going to Jerusalem, you are always going upward. In fact, there are some Psalms in your Psalter called the *Psalms of Ascent* that were frequently sung by the Jews as they were going to Jerusalem to celebrate the various feast days. The fact that Luke is talking about Peter leaving Caesarea and going up to Jerusalem, demonstrates that Luke (who wrote this book) had an awareness of the geography. This was not written by some guy in the second century, as the liberals say. This was written by someone who was an eyewitness to these things and knew the geography of the nation of Israel very well.

There is the occasion for the charge, "*and when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those who were circumcised took issue with him.*" Now, who is this group of "*those who were circumcised*"? It is called the Party of the Circumcision in the New Testament. Acts 15:5 says, "*But some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying, 'It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses.'*" When the second Jerusalem Council happens in Acts 15, there is a group of people called the *sect of the Pharisees* within the church; and they say that you cannot let Gentiles that are saved into the church without making them submit to the Law of Moses.

There is another reference to the sect of the Pharisees (or the Party of the Circumcision) in Galatians 2:12. Here there is a group of Pharisees within the church who connected themselves to James (the Lord's half brother) and tried to use his name to give authority for their theology. Galatians 2:12 says, "*For prior to the coming of certain men from James, [Peter] used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came*"—this Party of the Circumcision—" *[Peter] began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision.*"

What you need to understand is that within the early church there is a group of people that are legalists. They are Jewish, and as Jews they had been circumcised. They were what we would call *Pharisees* working within the confines of the church; and now we have to talk just a minute about Pharisees. When the Bible uses the word *Pharisees*, what is it talking about? Pharisees are people that always want to mix faith with law; they always want to mix grace with law. As if you can do that. That is like trying to mix oil and water.

One group of Pharisees would say, "You cannot be justified by faith alone. You have to be justified by faith plus—" And any time, as you know, someone adds a plus sign, it is immediately heresy. Salvation is by faith alone, through grace alone, through Christ alone, plus nothing. That equals salvation. Pharisees are always people that want to add something to faith. They think that faith is not enough. The Pharisees in Biblical New Testament times, in this Party of the Circumcision (false teachers operating within the church) were always trying to mix faith (or grace) with law.

There were three different groups of Pharisees in this Party of the Circumcision. The first group, the justification Pharisees, said, "You cannot be saved by faith alone. It has to be faith plus obedience to the law". The second group, the sanctification Pharisees, said, "You are saved by faith alone, but you know what? You cannot grow as a Christian by faith and dependence upon the Holy Spirit. That is not enough. It has to be faith (or grace) plus obedience to the law." And then the third group, the ecclesiological Pharisees said, "You are saved by faith alone, and you are growing by faith alone; but you cannot just come in here and join the church as a Gentile. You have to have faith plus obedience to the Mosaic Law." In other words, you have to submit to the Mosaic Law and the customs of the Mosaic Law to become a church member.

Those are the three groups that you will find in the New Testament and in the Book of Acts that are always trying to mix faith with law—justification Pharisees, sanctification Pharisees, and ecclesiological Pharisees. We have the same crowd around today, don't we? The names change and the theology changes a little bit, but it is the same old stuff. There are always people that say that faith is not enough to be saved; that faith, grace, and the work of the Holy Spirit are not enough to grow; or that faith, plus grace and the work of the Holy Spirit are not enough to join the church.

Jesus primarily dealt with the first group. He was always dealing with people (or Pharisees) that were mixing faith plus law to be justified. And Jesus overthrew that group with a statement that He made in Matthew 5:20. Once He made that statement, it was clear where Jesus stood on the issue. He said in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:20): *"For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven."* What Jesus was saying here is, "If you think faith plus obedience to the law justifies you, good luck with that, because your law keeping has to be better than the Pharisees and the Sadducees." The scribes and the Pharisees at that time, were looked at as the preeminent

law keepers in the whole nation. When Jesus made that statement, He made it very clear that no one is going to get into heaven on the basis of keeping the law. And if you think you can get in that way, your law keeping had better be perfect (which none of us have, right?).

That is why Jesus is always making statements to the Pharisees, that "the tax gatherers and the harlots are entering before you because they are entering by faith alone, and you think you are going to get in through your law keeping." It has been said that the first question people are going to ask when they get to heaven is, "What are they doing here? What are all those sinners doing here?" And then the second question is, "Where are all of the religious people? How come they are not here?" The Bible is very clear, and if it is not clear on this, it is not clear on anything. You get into heaven by faith alone in Christ alone. Period.

The second group of Pharisees (the sanctification Pharisees) that was arguing "faith plus law keeping helps you grow as a Christian", was overthrown by a statement that the apostle Paul made in the Book of Galatians. In Galatians 3:3, Paul (who is dealing with saved people) says, *"Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?"* The way you grow as a Christian is the exact same way you were justified as a Christian: by faith alone, relying upon the Holy Spirit alone. If you think some kind of religious performance mixed in with that will help you grow, it will not help you grow. The only thing it will do is frustrate you. The most frustrated people in the world are people that are trying to fulfill God's mandates on our lives through their own power. We do not grow as Christians through some kind of man made effort. We grow as Christians the same way we were justified by faith alone, under the power of the Holy Spirit alone. And so the second tier of Pharisees was overthrown in Galatians 3:3.

The third group of Pharisees said, "Maybe you are justified and sanctified by faith alone, but to be a member of the Christian church you have to submit to the Law of Moses." And remember that for 1500 years, the nation of Israel required proselytes (Gentile converts to Judaism) to convert to Judaism, to grow in the knowledge of Yahweh. Here Paul goes out on missionary journey number one into southern Galatia, (Acts 13 and 14), and all these Gentiles start getting saved just like crazy. Now they need to have their second Jerusalem Council to figure out what they are going to do with all these people. Remember, the leadership of the church at that time was still Jewish, and there was a mindset among certain Pharisees. "Hey, all these Gentiles, we have to make them into Jews for them to become part of the church." And that group of Pharisees was overthrown with the decision that the second Jerusalem Council made in Acts 15: You do not have to come under the Law of Moses in order to be a part of the church.

I would say that what we are dealing with here in Acts 11, is a group of Pharisees, number one, where they are upset that a Gentile got saved without submitting to the Law of Moses—the same group that Jesus spoke against in Matthew 5:20. These Pharisees were all over the place. They went underground and kind of emerged in the church and wanted to teach their legalism in the

church. That is why Peter here, after leading the first Gentile to Christ in Caesarea, is being challenged. They are basically in his face. It says there in Acts 11:2 that *"they took issue with him."* "How could you have led a Gentile to Christ without requiring submission to the Law of Moses?" Here Peter is being challenged.

Then in Acts 11:3, they make a formal accusation against Peter. Notice what it says: *"Saying, 'You [Peter] went to uncircumcised men and ate with them.'"* "Who do you think you are? How dare you? You, as a Jew, know better. How dare you go into the home of a Gentile and lead that Gentile to Christ without formally demanding that he submit to the Law of Moses in order to get saved." Now this creates an opportunity for Peter to defend himself, which he does in Acts 11:4-17.

This defense, which is a little long, is needed to move the church in the direction that God has for it—that, yes, in the Church Age, Gentiles get saved all the time. In fact, not only do Gentiles get saved, but there are going to be so many Gentile conversions that the Gentiles (once you get into Paul's first missionary journey) are going to become the dominant population in the church.

In Acts 11:4 Peter gives an exposition, but first we will go back to Acts 11:3. I want to show you what these Pharisees are upset about with Peter. You remember what happened in Acts 10:27-28 when Peter was talking with Cornelius:

*"As he talked with them, he entered and found many people assembled, and he said to them, 'You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him, and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean.'"*

God gave Peter a vision to communicate that it is now okay to go into a Gentile's home and share the gospel. The fact that Peter did this is what upset this group of Pharisees; and this is why Peter is defending himself.

Peter is on the hot seat. He gives his defense, and the first thing he does is he talks about his exposition. This is actually Luke recording what Peter is about to do, and it says in Acts 11:4: *"But Peter began speaking and proceeded to explain to them in orderly sequence, saying..."* Luke is going to take Peter's defense and lay it out as an orderly sequence; this is a detailed and orderly account. That language, *"detailed and orderly"*, should ring a bell, because that is what the Book of Acts is about. The Book of Acts is written by Luke to Theophilus, a Gentile who is questioning his own salvation. The purpose of the Book of Acts is to present Theophilus with an orderly account of the birth and growth of the church, so as to affirm him in what he has believed.

Remember, the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts go together: Luke, prequel; Acts, sequel. Luke told Theophilus this was what he was going to do in his prologue. Luke 1:1-4 says:

*"Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you may know the exact truth about the things that you have been taught."*

Then you get into the Book of Acts—which is part two of this two-volume set written by Dr. Luke to Theophilus, a Gentile—Luke says at the prologue to the Book of Acts (Acts 1:1-2):

*"The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day He was taken up to heaven, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen."*

What you have to understand is that Theophilus, who is most likely in Rome, is second guessing whether Christianity is for him; because, he as a Gentile, probably looks at Christianity and says, "The whole thing is so Jewish. Is it really for me, too? Yeah, I believed in Jesus for salvation, but I am having some doubts about this. Was I ever contemplated in the plan of God?"

And that is why Luke is putting together his material, weaving history together to show Theophilus very carefully that this whole thing is for him as well; not just through Christ's earthly ministry (part one; volume one; Gospel of Luke), but also in Christ's ministry through the church, while Christ is at the right hand of the Father (part two; volume two; Book of Acts). If you read those two volumes and put yourself in Theophilus' position, then you would say, "You know what? I was wrong. Yes, God used the nation of Israel in a strategic way, but He always had us Gentiles in mind. He had me in mind when this whole program was launched."

When you understand that big picture, you understand why Luke is taking Peter's words of his explanation of how Cornelius got saved and he is putting them together, just like he put the whole book together: in a chronological, ordinary, explanatory sequence, because he knows that Theophilus is going to read this account. he is going to say, "Wow, look at how much God worked to get the gospel to Cornelius in Caesarea. Wow. That same God has worked strategically to get the gospel all the way to me in Rome."

That is why this conversion of Cornelius comprises such a massive amount of material in the *Book of Acts*. We spent several weeks in Acts 10, did we not? And the account is still not over, because now Peter is rehearsing the material to the Jerusalem leadership. Why do we have to have two whole chapters explaining how God got the gospel to Cornelius? Because Theophilus would be reading these two chapters, along with all the other chapters; and he would say to himself, "Wow, look how much God loved Cornelius to get the gospel to him. I guess God loves me the same way, as a Gentile in Rome."

That is how what we are studying here fits into the big picture; and that is the significance of Acts 11:4 when it says, "But Peter began speaking and proceeded to explain to them in an orderly sequence." Peter does this for the benefit of the Jerusalem leadership, but Luke records it for the benefit of Theophilus. "Theophilus, I hope you are paying attention to this, because in this whole account you will see how much God loves the Gentiles and used the Jews, not just for the Jews, but to get the gospel to the Gentile peoples of the earth."

How did all this happen? Peter starts this account by going back to the original vision (Acts 11:5-6). Do you remember the original vision of the sheet with the animals on it? Do you think Peter was going to just walk into the home of a Gentile and share the gospel? No way. He was so steeped in Judaism, that that is the last thing on his mind. He needed a vision from God, to see that this was appropriate now to evangelize the Gentiles, by grace alone, without submission to the Law of Moses. Here Peter is recounting what happened to him in Acts 10.

In Acts 11:5-6, as he is defending himself to the Jerusalem leadership, he says:

*"I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, an object coming down like a great sheet lowered by the four corners from the sky; and it came right down to me, and when I had fixed my gaze on it and was observing it I saw the four-footed animals of the earth and the wild beasts and the crawling creatures and the birds of the air."*

The first thing Peter says is, "*I was in Joppa; and in a trance I saw a vision, an object coming down like a great sheet.*" The second part of Acts 11:5 indicates that it came right down to him. First he saw it coming down, then it came down to him. Peter sees it descending, and then he sees it making its way to where he was.

Then in Acts 11:6 he describes the content of what was in the sheet: It was a bunch of animals. Acts 11:6: "*and when I had fixed my gaze on it and was observing it I saw the four-footed animals of the earth and the wild beasts and the crawling creatures and the birds of the air.*" You need to understand this: for 1500 years, going back to the Law of Moses, there was a distinction made between clean and unclean animals. Some animals are clean; you could eat them under the Law of Moses. Other animals are unclean. And what Peter saw in this vision was a mixture of the two. This is what God had to do to get Peter into a frame of mind where he was even willing to share his faith with an uncircumcised Gentile.

This vision is followed by a threefold command in Acts 11:7. Until this point, everything Peter describes is what he saw; but in Joppa Peter did not just see, he also heard. He says, "*I also heard a voice saying to me, 'Get up, Peter; kill and eat.'*" Acts 11 does not tell us this, but Acts 10 tells us that Peter was hungry. The Lord waited until lunchtime to show him this. "It is mealtime, Peter. Here is the vision in the sheet of clean and unclean animals—some are forbidden by the



Law of Moses to eat, and some are allowed. Now I want you to do three things: I want you to get up; I want you to kill these animals on the sheet; and I want you to eat them." In other words, "I want you to eat what is unclean. I want you to eat what devout Jews for 1500 years have been forbidden from eating." This is basically what Peter is being told to do in this vision.

Look at Peter's response in Acts 11:8 as he is explaining this to the leadership of the church in Jerusalem. *"But I said, 'By no means, Lord, for nothing unholy or unclean has ever entered my mouth.'"* You may remember that statement *"By no means Lord"* from Acts 10:14. Remember, Peter is retelling the story of the vision in Acts 10. In Acts 10:14 Peter said, *"By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean."* Essentially, he is saying, "Not so, Lord." The word *Lord* (*Kyrios* in Greek) is used in both passages: Acts 10:14 and Acts 11:8.

Now let me just ask you a question. If He is your Lord, how can you tell Him no? That is an oxymoronic statement—a statement that contradicts itself. It is like saying a four-sided triangle, jumbo shrimp, or Microsoft works. Two ideas that really do not go together; for example, government efficiency. When Peter is saying, "Not so, Lord," he is telling His Lord "no".

There is a doctrine that you probably are aware of called Lordship Salvation, which says that if you do not make Jesus the Lord of your life, then you are not a Christian. If that doctrine is true, then Peter could not be a Christian here, right? Obviously, he was a Christian, because he told his Lord "no". In other words, a Christian has the ability to be unsubmitive to the Lordship of Christ. Now, is it a good place to be? No. Is it an unfortunate possibility? Yes. What does it mean when a Christian becomes like that? Does it mean that they are not a Christian? If it means that they are not a Christian, then the only conclusion you could reach is that Peter is not a Christian here, because he is clearly telling the Lord "no".

What we teach is that when a Christian becomes like that, they lose rewards and not salvation, because salvation is secure—but they lose rewards. This is what Paul is dealing with in 1 Corinthians 3:15 at the Judgment Seat of Rewards, where he says, *"If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire."* You could be in heaven and suffer a loss. You could be in heaven and have your works put through a fire—burned up as wood, hay, and stubble—yet you can be saved. That is not my doctrine. That is what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 3:15. It is not something that we invented.

There are three tenses of salvation: justification, sanctification, and glorification. Justification is the past tense of salvation. Sanctification is the present tense of salvation. Glorification is the future tense of salvation. In justification you exercise faith in the Messiah, for salvation as a lost sinner. You are saved from sin's penalty. Then the Holy Spirit comes into you, and now God says, "Let's grow up." As you are learning the walk of the Christian under the power of the Holy Spirit

through God's resources, what is gradually happening in your life is that you are being delivered from sin's power. It is a process, whereas justification is instantaneous.

Some Christians make great strides in the middle tense of salvation, and some do not. That is why some are fully rewarded at the Bema Seat Judgment of Christ, and some are not. If a person is not growing the way they should, it does not necessarily mean that they have never been born again. In the natural world there are many people who are born but who have malnutrition problems or developmental problems. The existence of a developmental problem does not negate their birth. That is where we are today as believers. We are growing in the middle tense of our salvation.

Then one day, either at Rapture or death (whichever comes first), we will be in glorification, where we will be delivered from sin's very presence, and we will not even have a desire to sin at all. Will that not be nice? Right now I have the desire to sin because I still have an old nature. I have a new nature, though, that can overcome the old nature if I walk by faith and obey the Lord's commandments in the New Testament. But because my old nature does not disappear, I am in that growth stage.

Just because you do not make progress on a particular day in the growth stage does not negate that you are a believer. You see a clear example of it here, where Peter tells the Lord, "Not so, Lord." If someone is going to come along and say that Peter was not saved, that is ludicrous. Peter had the keys to the Kingdom and he led the first Jews to Christ, led the first Samaritans to Christ, and led the first Gentile to Christ. This "not so, Lord" issue is very important to understand.

This is not a good thing that Peter is doing, but he is going back to what he knew from the law given at Mount Sinai 1500 years before (which was a long time for the Jews to be under that). Think about being under a system for 1500 years where you were told to distinguish between clean and unclean animals and do not eat unclean animals. When Peter sees the vision, and he sees the clean and the unclean, and he hears the voice that says, "Arise and eat," and he says, "Not so, Lord," why is he rebelling against God? He is rebelling against God because that is what his Jewish mind told him to do.

If somebody says, "Are you saved?" The answer is, "I have been saved, that is, justification. I am being saved, that is, sanctification. And I will be saved, that is, glorification." The word *save*—the Greek noun *soteria*, and the verb *sozo*—is used in the past tense, in the present tense, and in the future tense in the Bible. The verb does not always mean the same thing everywhere it is employed. In Ephesians 2:8-9 and Titus 3:5, it is used in the past tense. In Philippians 2:12, it is used in the present tense. In Romans 5:10 it is used in the future tense. A lack of progress in phase two does not mean you have not been born again, or else we would have to conclude that Peter was not a believer at this point, which obviously he was.

That is Peter's response. He says, "Not so, Lord." When you tell the Lord "no" He does not let you off the hook. (Have you noticed that?) The command comes a second time, as Peter is explaining all of this to the Jerusalem leadership. Acts 11:9: *"But a voice from heaven answered a second time, 'What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy.'"* The word for *second time* is the Greek word *deuteros*, where we get the name of the *Book of Deuteronomy*, which means "second law"—the law restated to the second generation that came out of Egypt that was in route to Canaan.

So, when you tell the Lord "no" He is going to come back a second time. When you get to heaven, you can talk to Jonah about that. The Lord said to Jonah, "Go east to Nineveh." And Jonah went west, to Spain. He went the exact opposite way. And the Lord put him in timeout for a few days in the belly of a fish and made the fish vomit him out onto dry land. Then it says in Jonah 3:1, "The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time." Aren't you glad that when we mess something up, God does not give up on us? He comes back the second time.

That is kind of what is happening with Peter. God is trying to communicate something to Peter through this vision: Peter, you are in a new dispensation. Throughout history, God governs things according to different rules. The plan of salvation is always the same—faith alone in Christ alone. Old Testament folks looking forward to a Messiah (whose name they did not know) were saved on credit. New Testament folks looking backward to a Messiah (whose name they do know) are not saved on credit because it has been paid for. Whether you are looking forward, by way of faith, to a coming Messiah, or looking backward, by way of faith, to a Messiah that has already come (named Jesus Christ), the plan of salvation is always the same.

However, the rules change. *Oikonomia*—which is the word translated *dispensation* in English (Ephesians 1:10 and 3:2)—means *house rules*. *Oikos* means *house*; *nomos* means *law*; *oikonomia* means *house rules*. In other words, as you move through the Bible, God changes the rules. This is not a theology read into the Bible. This is just observing the Bible. A dispensationalist is someone who steps back and looks at the Bible and says, "God's changing the rules." Because when you move from Genesis 1 and 2 (the Dispensation of Innocence) into Genesis 3, would you not agree that the rules change? Pregnancy is difficult, the ground is cursed, and death enters the picture.

This change of rules happens seven times in the Bible. We have the Dispensation of Innocence (Genesis 1 and 2). Then we have the Dispensation of Conscience (Genesis 4-8), the Dispensation of Human Government (Genesis 9-11), the Dispensation of Promise (Genesis 12 through Exodus 19). Next we have the Dispensation of the Law, which is the longest dispensation in the Bible. It starts at Mount Sinai and goes all the way to Acts 1, where the nation of Israel is still under the law.

The rules changed in Acts 2. We are in the Church Age today; we are not Israel. We are not governed by the same principles that national Israel was governed by. That particular dispensation will end with the Rapture. Not everyone agrees with this, but some, like myself, see the Tribulation period as a continuation of the Dispensation of Law. The seventh and final dispensation, that is still yet to come, is the Dispensation of the Millennial Kingdom.

The individual salvation plan is always the same, but it is obvious as you are moving through the Bible, that the rules are changing. I am not forcing this into the Bible; I am just reading the Bible. For example, how many of you are going to bring with you an unblemished lamb on Sunday to sacrifice? Well, the book of Leviticus tells you to do that. "Where is your lamb? And by the way, why are you showing up on Sunday? You should be here on Saturday. And by the way, what are you doing over here? You should be in the Middle East at the temple." "We cannot do that, Pastor." "Why not?" "There is no temple." "Well, there is another problem." The fact that you are not bringing unblemished sacrifices on Saturday to the temple, even though Leviticus tells God's people to do that, demonstrates that at some point the rules changed. We all have that understanding. We are not Israel under law. We are in the Church Age, where a different set of principles is transpiring.

What God is doing here with Peter is this: God is trying to move Peter out of the fifth dispensation and into the sixth. The nation of Israel had been in the fifth dispensation for 1500 years, so this is a learning process for Peter—a learning curve for him. And then comes the threefold repetition in Acts 11:10: *"This happened three times."* What happened three times? The sheet came down; the command was given to arise, kill, and eat; and three times Peter said, "Not so, Lord." They say that repetition is the greatest form of learning. God is putting Peter through this three times. That is how hard it is to get this stiff-necked Jew into a framework where he is willing to even go to the home of a Gentile and walk in his house and share truth.

What does it say after this? The sheet goes right back up to heaven, the vision is over, and the trance is over. Acts 11:10 says, *"This happened three times, and everything was drawn back up into the sky."* I showed you when this story was given in the early chapter (Acts 10), the word used for *drawn back up* is the same Greek word used for the ascension of Jesus in Acts 1. Just as in Acts 1, Jesus physically left planet Earth and went back up to heaven, so it happened here. Peter sees this vision—the animals in the sheet, the clean and the unclean. Then it repeats itself three times. After that, the sheet is lifted up and the whole thing is over.

It is at this point that Gentiles from Caesarea arrive in Joppa, (the place where Peter saw this vision), and they say to Peter, "We have to go from Joppa to Caesarea to meet a guy named Cornelius who needs the Lord." Once Peter sees this vision, now he is in a position to follow through with where these Gentiles want to take him. These are all of the steps laid out methodically, just as Luke said: "I am going to explain these things *'in orderly sequence.'*" These

are all the things that God did because he loved Cornelius that much. Theophilus, you are reading this and you should not doubt that God loves you also." That is why all these things are recorded.