



THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

The Record of the Beginning of Jesus' Reign

Chapter Eleven

INTRODUCTION

NOTE: Ritual and tradition seem to snowball and get out of hand in religious societies. Most religious ritual is off track, and participants commonly have no recollection of the original intent. Rituals are often continued for no other reason than for tradition. Tradition in itself is fine. But, participants should be willing to review and re-evaluate traditions and rituals. Otherwise, traditions end up supplanting reality and true history.

CHAPTER ELEVEN is a bit of a review of the events in chapter 10. This recounting of Peter's vision, and its application for those "of the circumcision," underscores the importance of objective Bible analysis. Peter did NOT teach that the food laws had been abolished, or that animals God had created unsuitable for man's food had now become edible.

Chapter 11 addresses the same problem as chapter 10: the elitist, self-righteous mentality of those of "the circumcision" who thought that they alone were worthy of God's recognition. Because of their rituals and associations, they thought they were uniquely worthy of God's favor. They looked down on others whom they determined were not worthy.

So, those of "the Circumcision" who were being called out were confronted with something new, and they were getting new spiritual insight. They could no longer keep the old faulty traditions of the elders.

Judean doctrine had been established centuries earlier. The same is true with churches today. Preachers tell Christians they must learn canonized doctrine (tradition of the elders) by rote. Questioning and re-examination are condemned and labeled "heresy." This tends to destroy the spirit of truth and squelch honest research of God's Word needed to prevent the institutionalization of error.

Self examination and improvement is a threat to church tradition. Honest researchers may find that they have been deceived ... and start looking outside the churches. Truth is dangerous to establishment churches because it upsets their contrived frameworks.

In chapter 11 we see what happens when a man learns that error has found its way into his traditions and institutions. Inevitably, when man finds the courage to admit error in his own life he also finds that he has been in error toward his fellow man ... and presumptuous toward his God. As we've been seeing in recent studies, the Judeans had developed a little world of their own through their rituals and traditions. They had come to assume that God favored their little world. But, through Peter, a valuable lesson was given for those with ears to hear.

Traditions can box people into a framework of error established over a long history. This is why traditions should always be questioned and researched ... and that often requires thinking outside the box.

ACTS 11:1 INSIGHT FROM GOD

Now the apostles and brethren that were in Judea heard that the nations also had accepted the word of God.

VERSE 45 of chapter 10 told us that the men “of the circumcision” that accompanied Peter, were astonished that non-Judeans (people of other nations) also could accept the Word of God. They were not just hearing it. They were ACCEPTING it. News of this soon reached Judea and caused even more astonishment.

ACTS 11:2-3 RESISTANCE TO NEW INSIGHT

And when Peter went up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him,

Saying he had gone in to uncircumcised men, and ate with them.

THE believers in Jerusalem still assumed that one could not be accepted, or become a disciple of Christ until he had first been circumcised. They believed the ritual of circumcision prepared you to receive Christ, and that anyone who wasn't circumcised couldn't be a bona fide Christian. Those who thought this way were known as “the Circumcision.” It was a label, like calling people “Baptists,” or “Catholics,” etc.

Judea's “circumcision” doctrine also related to the question of who was “clean” and who was “unclean.” Most of the believers in Jerusalem were adherents to the doctrine of circumcision. Those who contended with Peter were apparently still stuck in that tradition ... for they were described as being “of the Circumcision.” Therefore, they viewed themselves as clean, and the Uncircumcised as unclean.

When they learned that Peter (a “clean” person) had gone in among the Uncircumcised (the “unclean”), they were appalled. In verse three they want to know why Peter went in among “the unclean” and ate with them – making himself “common.”

However, Peter had just learned that God wanted him to go to the Uncircumcised – and that a man would not be defiled by contact with a non-Judean. He had learned that God looks at the heart (i.e., spirit) of a man – rather than his flesh.

The lesson Peter learned from his vision was going to

be hard to teach to his colleagues in Jerusalem, as seen later in Acts 15. In chapter 15, Paul and Peter both address the question of circumcision. In Antioch some Judaists had been teaching that unless men were circumcised they could not be saved. Then, Paul and Barnabas went from Antioch to Jerusalem to discuss this question with the elders.

4. Having come to Jerusalem, and having been received by the ecclesia and the apostles and the elders, they (Paul and Barnabas) were recounting the many things God had done through them.

5. But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up and said that it was necessary to circumcise them (of the nations) and charge them to observe the law of Moses.

6. And the apostles and the elders gathered together to see about this issue.

7. And after much discussion, Peter stood up and said to them: “Men, brothers, you know that a good while ago God chose among you that through my mouth the nations were to hear the good news, and believe.

8. And God, who knows the heart, bore witness by giving them the holy spirit just as He did to us also.

9. And He made no distinction between us and them, having purified their hearts to the faith.

Acts 15:4-9

In that meeting in Jerusalem they concluded that circumcision was not a test of salvation. However, at this point in Acts 11, the issue was still being sorted out. So Peter proceeds to explain his vision yet again.

CONSIDER THIS: Just as the issue of “circumcision” was used during Peter's day to create a sect with arbitrary parameters designed to give the appearance of power or superiority, Elitism is still alive today in groups as a means to brainwash and control their members. In fact, it is by this same method that secret fraternities like the Masons trick men into joining, accepting error, and submitting to ridiculous rituals.

ACTS 11:4-18 PETER TEACHES HIS LESSON AGAIN

But Peter began and went on to lay it out orderly to them, saying,

I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in astonishment I saw a vision, A descending vessel as a great linen sheet, let down out of heaven by its four corners; and it came down to me:

Upon which I observed and saw fourfooted creatures of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and birds of the heaven.

And I also heard a voice saying to me, Arise, Peter; kill and eat.

But I said, By no means, Lord: for things common or unclean never entered into my mouth.

But the voice answered a second time out of heaven, What God cleansed, do not call common.

And this occurred three times: and then all were drawn up again into heaven.

And, behold, suddenly there were three men standing at the house where we were, having been sent from Caesarea to me.

And having doubted nothing, I was inspired to go with them. And these six brethren accompanied me, and we

entered into the man's house:

He reported to us how he had seen the messenger in his house, which stood and said, Send forth to Joppa, for Simon who is surnamed Peter;

Who shall tell you sayings in which you and all your house will be saved.

And as I began to speak, the holy spirit fell on them, even as also upon us in the beginning.

Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how that He said, John indeed baptized in water; but you shall be baptized in holy spirit.

If therefore God gave the same free gift to them as he did to us also who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I should have power to withstand God?

When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Truly, God has granted also to the nations the repentance unto life.

• **IMPORTANT POINT #1:**
“Common” is not the same as “unclean.”

It is vital to understand verse nine. The voice did NOT say, “What I have cleansed do not call unclean.” Instead, it says, “What I have cleansed do not call common.” The term “common” is the key here. Remember we learned in lesson 10 that there is a distinct difference between the two words. “Common” refers to something that has been defiled by contact with the unclean. In other words, it means a clean thing can become “common,”

(or “in common”) with an unclean thing by being physically associated with it. However, an unclean thing cannot *become* common, because it is already considered unclean. So, “common” refers to something or someone that was once clean but had been changed by defilement.

The voice said “Peter, I’ve cleansed these people. Don’t call them ‘common’.” In other words, the old ritual, or your old belief, was flawed. People are defiled internally – not externally.

15. Nothing from outside of the man, entering into him is able to make him common (defile him); but the things coming out of the man are the things that make the man common (defile him).

Mark 7:15

• **IMPORTANT POINT #2:**
The correct definition of “common” shows that Peter’s vision validated God’s food laws!

Both clean and unclean (meats) had to be present together on the linen in Peter’s vision in order for the lesson to make sense. The food laws had not been changed. The food laws were for physical health – not for religious status.

• **IMPORTANT POINT #3:**
Peter didn’t immediately know what the vision meant.

In verses 11 and 12 Peter says that after he received this vision he continued mulling it over in his mind, trying to figure out what it meant. Preachers who claim that God abolished his own food laws would have you believe the vision was simple and easily understood!

But notice that God had three men arrive immediately after Peter received his vision ... to help him understand its meaning.

In verse 14 Peter perceives that the arrival of these men was connected to the message he had received in the vision. The three men wanted Peter to return with them to Caesarea and tell them the message of salvation they had heard about.

• **IMPORTANT POINT #4:**

The point of the passage was NOT that unclean food had been cleansed to make it fit to eat.

Verses 15-17 refer back to when holy spirit fell on the disciples on the Day of Pentecost. Peter said, in essence, *“I beheld God cleansing the people. Holy spirit came upon them the same as it came upon us at Pentecost. Since God was working with them too, who was I to reject these people? I can only tell you what I saw and learned.”*

Verse 18 indicates that “those of the circumcision” accepted the fact that God had granted “repentance unto life” to the nations (those scattered abroad). From the context of the story it is obvious that the point of Peter’s vision had nothing to do with an alleged change in God’s food laws. Rather, it had to do with a change in the condition of a man’s heart.

• **IMPORTANT POINT #5:**

Many churches and many Christians teach men to ignore God’s food laws (and other laws) by claiming they were abolished!

Such churches apparently ignore the following verses of Scripture:

17. Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fully comply.

18. For truly I say unto you, More likely would the heaven and the Earth pass away than for one iota or one little jot to pass away from the law, until all things are ended.

19. If anyone therefore shall abolish one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, this one shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:17-19

Jesus was not suggesting that the heaven and the Earth were about to pass away and that time was about to end. In other words, there was no chance that God’s Law would ever be abolished!

Verse 19 is a hard pill for churchgoers to swallow. Think about it. The established churches – the presumed keepers of Christianity and apple of God’s eye – are actually the least in the kingdom because they abolish God’s law and teach men so by telling everyone the wrong meaning of Peter’s vision!

• **IMPORTANT POINT #6:**

Peter had learned, through his vision, that the Judeans (himself included) had a wrong concept of what it meant to be “clean.”

Judean Christians at that time were evidently afraid that they would become tainted or “common” if they associated with a foreigner. This is the whole issue of the vision. Peter had just been given the insight that he and other Judeans were to no

longer view their estranged Israelite brethren in other lands as “common” or defiled.

Verse 18 says they acknowledged that God had granted “repentance unto life” to the people of the nations. This means Kingdom life: Eonian life. This is “the life” or “the raising up,” that Jesus gives. This is the life that He grants to us, here and now, enabling us to repent and follow Him. It is that new life that motivates man to follow Christ.

QUESTION: Are you saying that religious rituals, such as circumcision and other rituals of the church, are not important? Don’t people need these rituals in their lives to give their lives and their religion meaning?

ACTS 11:19-26 PETER’S LESSON SPREADS

Therefore, the ones who had been driven out by the persecution that arose about Stephen went through as far as Phoenicia, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word unto the Judaists only.

But some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they came to Antioch, spoke also unto the Grecians, declaring the good news of the Lord Jesus.

And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.

Then word about them came unto the ears of the ecclesia which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas to Antioch.

Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, he rejoiced, and encouraged them all to keep their hearts true to the Lord.

For he (Barnabas) was a good man, and full of holy spirit and of

faith: and a sizable crowd was added to the Lord.

Then he went out to Tarsus, to seek Saul:

And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And it came to pass that they spent a whole year together in the ecclesia; and taught a large crowd. And it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians.

VERSE 19 refers to believers who had been driven out after the stoning of Stephen. These, in their exile, had not yet heard that Christ's calling was to others besides the Judeans. In other words, they thought only the Circumcised were eligible to become Christians.

So, they only spoke to those who were of the Judean religion – i.e., Judaists; the Circumcised – telling them of Christ.

By the way, after the disciples were driven out of the Jerusalem area, Antioch became the headquarters for Christianity in that part of the world. Verse 20 says that disciples were coming to Antioch and that they also spoke to the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. And so the title "Christian" took root in Antioch.

Verses 22 and 23 tell us that Barnabas, as a representative of the ecclesia at Jerusalem, went to Antioch and witnessed that Jesus was implementing what Peter had seen in the vision. He saw that many other people besides Judeans were being called to enter the Kingdom of Christ.

Barnabas went looking for Saul, whom we later come to know as "Paul." He found him and returned with him to Antioch where they stayed with the ecclesia for one year.

ACTS 11:27-30 THE ECCLESIA AT ANTIOCH

And in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch.

And one stood out of them named Agabus, and signified through the spirit that there was about to be a great famine upon all the inhabited lands: which came to pass in the days of Claudius.

Then the disciples, according as anyone was able, determined to send assistance to the brethren dwelling in Judea:

Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

AS THE truth of Peter's vision spread, about reaching the brethren in the nations, Antioch became a magnet for Christians from all over. Holy spirit abounded.

Some men with insight predicted a famine in the "inhabited lands" – i.e., in the lands that they knew at that time. That was their "world." At that time people did not have today's conception of the entire Earth inhabited with people. There were still vast areas that were unknown to the common man, so their perceived "world" was different than it is to us today.

The predicted famine did indeed come to pass. So the Antioch Ecclesia gathered together supplies and sent relief to their brethren in Judea.

SUMMATION:

If you look at these eleven chapters as a whole, you can see that Jesus was working something wondrous. But we must try to be objective about what we read here.

Jesus was driving people away from their former ties and lifestyles. It's very much like what God did with Abraham. He told Abraham,

"Go out and start a new life for me and I'll guide you into a land you don't yet know about." He told these Christians the same thing. He drove them out of their former ways, and gave them new ways. He caused them to separate themselves from the Roman and Judean forms of religion and government.

Christ was showing His followers, at that time – and us today as well –

that His reign, (the Reign or Kingdom of Christ) is completely unlike the kingdoms devised by men. The two systems are incompatible. Christ's Reign was not like Caesar's. It was not like Jerusalem's, or Babylon's. Let's also add that it is not like Washington, D.C.. It is not like any government devised by man – now or in the past. Christ's kingdom was, and is, FREEDOM

FROM MAN RULERS. That is one of the main identifying marks of the Reign of Christ.

In like manner the real message of the Bible is nothing like man's authorized religions say it is. As we compare these series of lessons in Acts with the traditional explanations originating in the church establishment, we see a vastly different picture. Instead of the passive, innocuous, empty message mixed with fanciful superstitions, we are reading a vital, effective, non-fiction message about the ecclesia: Christ's Reign.

Politicians and preachers have been trying for years to separate the concept of freedom from the concept of Christ. They think of freedom in political terms, and of Christ in mystical religious terms. And this is largely because they have accepted the premise of "church and state." Politicians and preachers have convinced most people to believe that God created church and state as the institutions of Christian society ... and that He wants them kept alive and separate. But, the truth is that these were instituted by Babylonian man – not by God. Church and State are products of man.

Nowadays, what passes for "Christianity" (actually Churchianity) is so ineffective and out of touch with the real world that the term "Christianity" has been soiled: stigmatized. But, true Christianity – if we can use the term correctly – MUST also be freedom. It must be freedom to worship Christ and not men. Government can NOT be separated from true Christianity because Christ IS government!

The vital message of the Reign of Christ – what these disciples and followers of Christ were learning, and what we must learn again today – is that there can be no human rulers or lawgivers in government. True Christianity equals freedom from tyranny, as well as freedom from man-made, ritualistic religions with their mysterious doctrines of heaven, a burning hell, and other mythological absurdities that confuse and neutralize.

Remember, these same man-made religions are telling us that we have a God who appeared to Peter in a vision and told him that He (God) had made a mistake in His former laws concerning food. But if God knows the beginning from the end, why would He need to correct His Laws? This would depict God as having the character of man who must experiment in order to gradually improve upon his ideas. God has no need to continually experiment. He can create his Law perfect at the start without need for correction.

When we are free from human rulers we are free to follow Christ. When we understand the reign of Christ, and when we can apply it to ourselves, then Jesus – not man – judges us. That means we try to do what is right and Christ is our Judge. If we do something wrong, Christ is our Judge. If we do something right, Christ is our Judge. Both blessings and judgments come from Christ – not from some bureau in Washington, D.C.. Christ, not the welfare department, and not some licensing bureau, will determine whether or not we're blessed in our endeavors.

You may say, "But in most cases man's punishment must be administered man, according to the law." This is true. God often uses man to punish man ... but it should be according to the law and judgments of God as shown in scripture, and applied in the spirit of Christ. The right ways for man to punish man aren't determined by laws that are conceived and drawn up by man. The right ways of enforcement and punishment are determined by the laws of God.

Freedom to follow God according to your best understanding, and to be accountable for our own actions, is what Christ's reign is about. And that is what central governments prevent by their monopolization of power. Men, particularly Christian men, acting to the best of their conscience, knowing that they are answerable to King Jesus, will not willingly submit themselves to man's central rulership. Neither will they blindly follow unproven ritual and tradition.

QUESTION: If we abandon man's government and laws as you advocate, who is to say if God's laws will be PROPERLY interpreted? It's been proven that men can and do interpret the Bible any way they want, and this will lead to disagreements and even wars between the various churches. There will then be a loss of law and order instead of the orderly society we now enjoy with man's more specific and up-to-date law.

PONDER THIS: In the book of Acts, Jesus is driving people away from man's government. This is quite a different picture than we see happening today. Today, we see most people upset with the "crooks" in government, but they are still comfortable with the concept of government-by-man ... and want to preserve the system.

Jesus is showing us that His system of government is different than man's. So if we choose to "preserve" or "conserve" (what "Conservatives" do) man's present system of government, we are admitting that we are not really in alignment with Jesus' reign.

END OF CHAPTER ELEVEN

FOR ANSWERS AND NOTES, SEE "ANSWER SECTION" BELOW.

POINTS TO REMEMBER:

1. The lesson from Peter's vision was NOT about a change of God's law. It was about a wrong Judean TRADITION carried over into the lives of the disciples.
2. The health laws (clean and unclean foods) had NOT been abolished ... any more than the laws of physics, chemistry, gravity, and the Ten Commandments.
3. The Judeans had developed a private pagan world of blind self-righteousness. They adopted man-made Babylonian rituals and traditions. In spite of the fact that these were THEIR rituals and traditions, they ascribed them to God – much like the churches have done.
4. Through Peter's vision Jesus freed his disciples of an erroneous way of viewing the world, and gave them the ability to accomplish the work He had commissioned them to do regarding the Israelites who had been, and were being, scattered into other lands away from Jerusalem and Judea.
5. The words "common" and "unclean" do NOT mean the same thing.
6. God's laws offer the ultimate in freedom, health, and happiness. Man's laws and traditions interfere with the natural way of God's laws.

ANSWERS:

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Rituals and traditions do indeed give meaning to beliefs and lives. However, when the rituals and traditions are WRONG, they give the wrong meanings, and man ends up institutionalizing error. This has an effect of confusing, hurting, and eventually destroying us.

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Abandoning the ways of man's system can indeed be scary ... especially when we've grown so dependent upon them. As we've pointed out before, the Children of Israel faced scary challenges when they left Egypt with Moses. But, we should learn from their lives, and their mistakes.

Remember, it is NOT a bad thing that you interpret the Bible (i.e., God's laws) differently other people. While differences of opinion can be uncomfortable, they can often promote learning and growth. Rather, what we must worry about is any group of men who conspire together to take away our freedoms and to ENFORCE their opinions in the form of laws.

Furthermore, not having a police state is good. This is called "freedom." When people want a police state they invite men to make their laws for them leading to tremendous wrongs legislated, interpreted, and enforced through law by central government.

God's laws prove themselves superior to man's laws. The only time this issue gets confusing is when conspiracies of men work together to override nature and truth by forcing false standards and deceptions upon

mankind.

Without the mind-manipulators and perverters in government and religion to cloud everyone's view and change the natural perception of cause-and-effect in man's life, sin does not prosper. Wholesomeness appears to be wholesome, and sin appears to be unwholesome (like government) .



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