

Acts 11: 1 - 18  
Psalm 148  
Revelation 21: 1 - 6  
John 13: 31 - 35

### **Notes on the Lesson from the Acts of the Apostles**

One of the great disputes within the early church was the question of whether or not the gospel was limited only to Jews or could it be offered to Gentiles as well. As is plain from reading Paul's letters, Jewish Christians did not consider themselves to be "converts". They saw faith in Jesus as a continuation of their Judaism. In their view, it was Judaism that had been transformed. They continued to worship in the Temple, to gather in synagogues, and to observe kosher dietary laws. To many of these early believers, their evangelism was to lead other Jews to Jesus. If a Gentile wished to follow Jesus, that person would have to first become a Jew. Other believers, such as Peter and later, Paul, insisted that faith in Jesus alone was sufficient.

The significance of sharing a meal in the Middle East can not be overstated. Eating a meal together binds two people in eternal friendship. This is why it was such a scandal when Jesus ate with sinners and tax collectors. We see the same reaction, this time coming from Jesus' followers, when Peter has shared a meal with Gentiles.

### **Notes on the Lesson from the Revelation to John**

Two weeks ago, this message concerned a passage in the fifth chapter of Revelation. In those notes, the ancient belief in a three-tiered universe was considered. To fully understand this week's text from Revelation, that belief must again be examined.

People of the ancient world had no concept of a vast universe filled with millions of galaxies and billions of stars. Their picture of creation is known as the "three-tiered universe".

The three tiers are:

1. The Heavens – picture a series of upside down Tupperware bowls. These are the heavens that are stacked up over the earth. In the lowest bowl, or lowest heaven, are the sun, the stars, and the planets. God lives above the highest heaven.
2. The Earth – a flat expanse of land that is surrounded by the sea. The sea holds terrifying monsters and represents chaos and rebellion.
3. The Deep – An area that is mostly water but contains the region of Sheol, which is the abode of the dead. This is not Hell as we think of it but more of a place where souls go after death. There is no self-awareness there; it can be thought of as a repository for souls.

Notice that the first verse of this passage says that there is a new heaven and a new earth. There is no "Deep" for there is no need for it. There is no more death so no place is needed for the dead. Also, there is no more sea. Chaos and rebellion, represented by the sea, no longer exist.

God has re-created the universe without death and without disorder. God's peace permeates everything.

Many people are not aware that when Revelation was written, there was no city of Jerusalem. It had been utterly destroyed by the Roman army in A.D. 70. God's re-making of all creation would have been incomplete were the holy city, a new Jerusalem, been a part of it. The author of Revelation paints an amazing picture: all of creation is reborn, everything is made new; all of those aspects of the world that we feared are gone. "God will wipe away all tears from their eyes. There shall be no more death, no more sorrow, no more crying or pain, for the former things are no more."