

## ACTS 11 – They called them Christians!

THEME: Peter defends his ministry; gospel goes to Antioch.

Peter recounts the events in connection with the conversion of Gentiles in the home of Cornelius. The news that the Gentiles had received the Word of God did not seem to bring any joy to the church in Jerusalem. They demand of Peter an explanation of his conduct, so Peter must defend his ministry—which is really difficult for Simon Peter, as he himself feels apologetic about it.

Antioch becomes the center of the gentile church.

***Act 11:1-3 Now the apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him, saying, "You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!"***

There was doubt and division. We need to understand that to the Jews the action of Simon Peter was a terrible thing. In fact, if we could have talked to Simon Peter a month before this, he also would have said it was a terrible thing to do. Actually, Peter gives them an apology. He makes it clear that he didn't want to do it at all, but that the Spirit of God was in the whole episode. – McGee

**Where is it written in the law of Moses that Jews cannot eat with Gentiles? Have you ever been accused of something that broke a tradition but never a biblical law?**

***Act 11:4-7 But Peter explained it to them in order from the beginning, saying: "I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, an object descending like a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came to me. When I observed it intently and considered, I saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. And I heard a voice saying to me, 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat.'***

Remember this is a command not a suggestion. Yet, Peter disobeys three times. Have you ever been there?

***Act 11:8-11 But I said, 'Not so, Lord! For nothing common or unclean has at any time entered my mouth.' But the voice answered me again from heaven, 'What God has cleansed you must not call common.' Now this was done three times, and all were drawn up again into heaven. At that very moment, three men stood before the house where I was, having been sent to me from Caesarea.***

Peter is stubborn disobeys three times, so God plans on using him anyway out of His grace. Hence, three Roman Soldiers come knocking. God must have known a subtle prompting by the Lord to spread the Gospel to Gentiles would not work, so He sent soldiers. **Have you ever been there? Disobeyed multiple times and God ups the stakes and chases after you?**

***Act 11:12-14 Then the Spirit told me to go with them, doubting nothing. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered the man's house. And he told us how he had seen an angel standing in his house, who said to him, 'Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter, who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved.'***

In defending his action, Peter gave a simple recital of all that had happened—his vision of the sheet let down from heaven, the appearance of an angel to Cornelius, the arrival of the messengers from Cornelius, the Spirit's command to accompany them, and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the

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Gentiles. Since God had worked in so many definite and yet distinct ways, to resist or oppose would obviously have been to oppose the Lord.

In his message, Peter added several interesting details not given in the previous chapter:

1. He said that the sheet ... from heaven ... came right down to where he was (v. 5).
2. He spoke of observing it intently (v. 6).
3. Peter adds the detail that six brethren accompanied him from Joppa to Caesarea (v. 12).
4. In verse 14 we are informed that the angel promised Cornelius that Peter would tell him words by which he and all his household would be saved. This verse is one of the principal evidences that Cornelius was not a saved man before Peter's arrival. – Believers' Bible Commentary

***Act 11:15-16 And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning. Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, 'John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'***

According to Peter's account, the Holy Spirit fell upon the Gentiles as he began to speak. In Act\_10:44 it appears that he had already been speaking some time. Apparently, he had begun to speak but was interrupted before he had proceeded very far. When the Holy Spirit fell on the Gentiles, Peter thought immediately of Pentecost. Then his mind went back further to the Lord's promise that His disciples would "be baptized with the Holy Spirit." He realized that the promise had been fulfilled in part at Pentecost and was now being fulfilled again. - Believers' Bible Commentary

***Act 11:17-18 If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?" When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, "Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life."***

Then Peter faced the circumcision party with this question: If therefore God chose to pour out the Spirit on the Gentiles, as He had done previously on the Jews who believed ... , who was Peter that he should withstand God?

It is to the credit of these Hebrew Christians that when they had heard Peter's account, they recognized the hand of God in it all and did a complete about-face. All their objections were gone. In their place was praise to God for granting to the Gentiles repentance to life. - Believers' Bible Commentary

**What would have happened to the spread of the Gospel if the Hebrew Christians would have been insistent on the circumcision issue? Have we ever stifled the movement of the Holy Spirit based on legalism?**

### ***The Church in Antioch***

***Act 11:19 Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only.***

The narrative now goes back to the time of the persecution following the martyrdom of Stephen. In other words, the events described in the next verses took place before the conversion of Cornelius.

Those who were scattered after the persecution carried the gospel to:

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1. Phoenicia, the narrow coastland along the northeast Mediterranean, and including the ports of Tyre and Sidon (modern Lebanon).
2. Cyprus, a large island in the northeast Mediterranean.
3. Cyrene, a port city on the north coast of Africa (modern Libya).

However, they preached the gospel to no one but the Jews. – Believers' Bible Commentary

***Act 11:20-22 But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord. Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch.***

But there were certain of the believers from Cyprus and Cyrene who went to Antioch and there proclaimed the good news to the Hellenists. Blessing accompanied their preaching and a great number believed and turned to the Lord. F. W. Grant says: "It is remarkable how officialism is discredited in all this. We do not know the name of a single person used in the work."

The introduction of Christianity to Antioch was an important step in the forward march of the church. Antioch was located on the river Orontes in Syria, north of Palestine. It was considered the third city of the Roman Empire, and has been dubbed "the Paris of the ancient world." From here, Paul and his companions later went forth on their missionary journeys, taking the good news to the Gentiles. – Believers' Bible Commentary

There is a great moving of the Spirit of God in Antioch, and the church in Jerusalem hears about it. So the Jerusalem church sends Barnabas to Antioch. We are going to see now that Antioch becomes the second center of the church. In fact, the center actually shifts from Jerusalem to Antioch. - McGee

***Act 11:23-24 When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord. For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord.***

This is a wonderful thing that is said about Barnabas. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit, and full of faith. And, my friend, there is no reason why every Christian shouldn't be a good person.

Barnabas became the pastor of the church there. He began "exhorting," which would be preaching and teaching. And the congregation grew, for "much people was added unto the Lord." As the church grew, it became evident to Barnabas that he needed an assistant pastor, and he knew where to get a good one. – McGee

**Do you know people that will continue to claim they can do it and not ask for help? Have you ever had a job where the boss will not promote anyone who could be a threat?**

**How did Barnabas glorify God with this decision and how can we be like him?**

**Think about it. They were a lot safer choices than Saul. Also, Barnabas had to be humble enough to know he needed help and pick someone with skills better than him.**

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***Act 11:25-26 Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.***

Then Barnabas remembered Saul of Tarsus! It was he who had introduced Saul to the apostles at Jerusalem. Then Saul had been whisked out of the city to rescue him from the plots of the Jews. Since then he had been in his home town, Tarsus. Anxious to encourage Saul in the ministry and to give the church in Antioch the benefit of his teaching, Barnabas departed for Tarsus and brought Saul to Antioch. For a whole year this splendid team worked with the church there, teaching a great many people.

It was in Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians. Doubtless it was a term of reproach at that time, but since then it has been welcomed by all who love the Savior.

J. A. Stewart comments:

Saintly F. B. Meyer has said: "Antioch will ever be famous in Christian annals, because a number of unordained and unnamed disciples, fleeing from Jerusalem in the face of Saul's persecution, dared to preach the Gospel to Greeks and to gather the converts into a church in entire disregard of the initial rite of Judaism."

If these believers had gone from a modern congregation in which the ministry was designated to the sole responsibility of one man, this triumphant period of the Church's history could never have been written. How tragic that in the average church the ministry gifts of the Holy Spirit lie dormant and latent, because the average believer has no opportunity to minister. As long as every little group of believers has a paid pastor to take care of them, there is one thing certain, and that is, the world will never be evangelized. Thank God for all the voluntary Sunday school superintendents, Sunday school and Bible class teachers and so-called laymen. If they all had to be paid for their services very few churches would be able to function financially. – Believers' Bible Commentary

***Act 11:27-30 And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar. Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.***

The incident that is recorded here is also verified in secular history. There was a general famine, but the effect was especially felt in Jerusalem where the church had been persecuted, decimated, and hurt. They were in dire need during this time. It is wonderful to see the fraternal spirit, the bond of love, that held the early church together. The other believers sent help to the troubled church in Jerusalem.

We remember that Saul had been one of those who had wasted the church in Jerusalem by his relentless persecution of them. How wonderful it is to see that by his own hands a transformed Saul now brings relief to that same church. That is Christianity in shoe leather, my friend. That is the way it ought to be. – McGee

**Peter got restored three times by Jesus on the beach. Here Saul gets the opportunity to bless the very church he persecuted in a time of need. Do you believe that God will give you an opportunity to make amends? Pray for it and believe it with Kingdom faith.**

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## Christianity at Antioch

I. Its entrance into Antioch. Here (Act 11:19) we discover—

1. Evil overruled for good. The very efforts to crush the gospel gave it new vigour and a wider sweep. Thus it has ever been.
2. The invincibility of Christian courage. The fugitives did not flee from the cause they had espoused, nor relax their efforts to advance it. While true courage does not consist in callous indifference to danger, it demands at all risks eternal fealty to principle and duty.
3. The legitimacy of lay preaching. It is significant that the planting of Christianity here, and in numerous instances since, has been the work of private men holding no ecclesiastical office whatever: which shows—
  - (1) That it is the duty of everyone who knows the gospel to proclaim it.
  - (2) That those who would restrict preaching to the professionally ordained are opposed to the best interests of man and to the genius of the New Testament.
4. The universality of the gospel. It is a system as suited to the Greek as to the Hebrew mind, and equally essential to the highest interests of both. -Biblical Illustrator