

Acts 11 - Response of the Jerusalem Church; Peter Defends His Conduct; Antioch as New Church Headquarters

II. Outreach in Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1—12:25)

(6) Conversion of Cornelius (10:1—11:18)

(B) Peter's report of Cornelius's conversion to the Jerusalem church (11:1-18)

(7) Church at Antioch (11:19-30)

(A) Birth and maturation (11:19-26)

(B) Missionary zeal (11:27-30)

Acts 11

(B) Peter's report of Cornelius's conversion to the Jerusalem church (11:1-18)

Peter's defense of Gentile salvation to the church leaders in Jerusalem is really the first church-wide counsel. Many people consider the meeting in Acts 15 the first church counsel, but the events surrounding Gentile salvation and Peter's defense of its authenticity were really the first church counsel.

It's interesting that at the beginning of the church, Jews couldn't believe that God would save Gentiles. But today near the end of the church, Gentiles cannot believe that God will save Jews.

At this first Jerusalem Council, Peter had to explain to the leadership that Cornelius' salvation was real. The purpose of the second Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), after Paul returned from his 1st missionary journey where many Gentiles were saved, was to decide if these newly saved Gentiles had to convert to Judaism to join the church.

The topic at the first Jerusalem Council (Acts 11) is a soteriological issue; the topics at the second Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) is an ecclesiological issue.

1 Now the apostles and the brothers *and sisters* who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had **received** the word of God.

1 Now the apostles and the brethren who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God.

1 Now the apostles and the brothers who were in Judea heard that the gentiles had also accepted the word of God.

1 And the apostles and brethren that were in Judaea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God.

- Acts 11:1-18 are a recap of the events of Acts 10. The real ministry to the Gentiles emerges out of Antioch.
- Word spread quickly to Judea, including to the 11 other apostles (besides Peter)
- "...received" - a synonym for "believed" (Cf. John 1:12)

2 And when Peter came **up to Jerusalem**, the **Jewish *believer* took issue** with him,

2 And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those who were circumcised took issue with him,

2 But when Peter went up to Jerusalem, those who emphasized circumcision disagreed with him.

2 And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him,

- "...up to Jerusalem" - even though geographically Jerusalem is southeast of Caesarea, Luke writes that Peter "went up" to Jerusalem

— Jerusalem is at elevation, so when the Bible talks about going to or coming from Jerusalem, it always speaks of it as "going up to" or "coming down from" Jerusalem

- "...Jewish *believers*" - Jewish Christians, not unsaved Jews (Cf. v15)

— This was the pharisaic wing of the Church; a small minority extremist group, who felt circumcision was necessary for Gentile salvation

— They were called "the party of the circumcision" (Cf. "sect of the Pharisees" in 15:5)

— This group is also mentioned in Gal 2:12 (Cf. "party of the circumcision"). They were legalists or Pharisees who were believers and part of the church.

— Pharisees, both secular Jews and believers in the church, always want to mix faith/grace with adherence to the Law. There were three groups of Pharisees:

- Justification - Pharisees who believed that you had to have faith plus obedience to the Law to be saved.
 - Jesus primarily dealt with this issue during His ministry
 - He overthrew this belief with His teaching on the Sermon on the Mount. In Matt 5:20, Jesus said, "If your righteousness does not surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven."
 - The scribes and Pharisees were looked at as the pinnacle of righteousness and adherence to the Law. Jesus is saying that if you think you can get to heaven by your works, you better be perfect.
- Sanctification - Pharisees who believed that a person is saved by faith alone in Christ alone, but in order to grow as a Christian you have to obey the Law.
 - Paul primarily dealt with this issue in the epistles

- Paul overthrew this belief in his teaching in Gal 3:3, when he told the Galatians, "Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected in the flesh?"
 - Paul is explaining that the way you grow as a Christian is the exact same way you were justified: by faith alone, in reliance on the Holy Spirit. And if you believe that you are saved through faith alone in Christ alone, but they you need to work up your flesh to keep the Law in order to grow, you're "foolish."
 - The most frustrated people in the world are the ones who are trying to fulfill God's mandates for righteousness under their own power (flesh).
 - Ecclesiology - Pharisees who believed that a person is saved and grows through faith alone in Christ alone, but you have to obey the Law in order to join the church.
 - The Jews for 1500 years had a requirement for Gentiles who wanted to follow God to first become a proselyte and be circumcised (convert to Judaism).
 - Contradicted by the second Jerusalem Council, Acts 15.
- "...took issue" - the Greek word means "to separate"; they separated themselves apart or took sides against Peter
- The seeds for the great controversy of Acts 15 were sown here. Within two decades of Peter's meeting with Cornelius, a group of Jewish Christians split from the truth and separated themselves into a sect called the "circumcision party" (15:1,24).

3 saying, "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them."

3 saying, "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them."

3 They said, "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them!"

3 Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them.

- These pharasaic Jewish believers chastised Peter for entering the home of a Gentile, and eating with them (Cf. 10:48)

— They were apoplectic that Peter would enter a Gentile home, eat with them, then lead that Gentile to Christ, without also demanding that they also submit to the Mosaic Law

— The same taboo that initially bothered Peter also bothered his Jewish brothers

— They were concerned that Peter's actions would bring more persecution on Jewish Christians from unsaved Jews (Cf. 7:54—8:3)

— If you go back to 10:27-28, you can see that Peter knew He was following God's specific instructions, but he also knew he'd receive a lot of pushback on what he was doing

— It is specifically what Peter did in 10:27-28 that upset this group of Pharisees

Interesting note here that Peter was not being regarded as any kind of pope or overlord. In fact, we don't see any hint of any type of this treatment of Peter anywhere in Scripture.

Peter's Defense of His Conduct

4 But Peter began and explained *at length* to them in an **orderly sequence**, saying,

4 But Peter began *speaking* and *proceeded* to explain to them in orderly sequence, saying,

4 Then Peter began to explain to them point by point what had happened. He said,

4 But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them, saying,

- "...orderly sequence" - Luke is stating that Peter is going to recount his ministry to Cornelius as it happened (a sequential order of events)

— This recalls Luke's purpose for writing the Gospel of Luke (prequel) and Acts (sequel). In Luke 1:3, Luke states his purpose to give Theophilus the events of Christ's ministry in "consecutive order."

— The purpose for Luke's writing of Acts, also addressed to Theophilus, was to present him with an orderly account of the birth and growth of the church, in order to affirm him in what he believed

— So Luke puts together Peter's recounting of his visit with Cornelius in the same way he put together his account of Jesus' life and ministry and his account of the birth and growth of the church

5 "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 four corners from the sky; and it came to where I was,

5 "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 four corners from the sky; and it came right down to me,

5 "I was in the town of Joppa praying when in a trance I saw a vision: Something like a large linen sheet descended down from heaven, lowered by its four corners, and it came right down to me.

5 I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me:

6 and I stared at it and was thinking about it, and I saw the four-footed animals of the earth, the wild animals, the crawling creatures, and the birds of the sky.

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.

6 When I examined it closely, I saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild animals, reptiles, and birds of the air.

6 Upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.

- Peter saw both clean and unclean animals (according to the Mosaic Law)
- This is what God had to do to get Peter to a point where he'd be willing to enter the home of, share his faith with, a Gentile

7 I also heard a voice saying to me, 'Get up, Peter; kill and eat.'

7 I also heard a voice saying to me, 'Get up, Peter; kill and eat.'

7 I also heard a voice telling me, 'Get up, Peter! Kill something and eat it.'

7 And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay and eat.

- Jesus followed up the vision (v5-6) with a command...

— The three-fold command was: (1) Get up; (2) Kill the animals on the sheet (clean and unclean), and (3) Eat the animals

— The instruction from Jesus was for Peter to eat animals that were unclean to a devout Jew, the same (unclean) animals that had previously been forbidden for a devout Jew to eat for the past 1500 years

— Peter doesn't mention in this account that he was hungry (Cf. 10:9-10)

8 But I said, 'By no means, Lord, for nothing unholy or unclean has ever entered my mouth.'

8 But I said, 'By no means, Lord, for nothing unholy or unclean has ever entered my mouth.'

8 But I replied, 'Absolutely not, Lord, for nothing common or unclean has ever entered my mouth!'

8 But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth.

- Peter recounts his response to the Lord verbatim (10:14)

9 But a voice from heaven answered **a second time**, 'What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy.'

9 But a voice from heaven answered a second time, 'What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy.'

9 Then the voice from heaven answered a second time, 'You must stop calling common what God has made clean!'

9 But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.

- "...a second time" - God is a God of second chances (Cf. Jonah 3:1; for Israel, Acts 7)

10 This happened **three times**, and everything was drawn back up into the sky.

10 This happened three times, and everything was drawn back up into the sky.

10 This happened three times. Then everything was pulled back up to heaven.

10 And this was done three times: and all were drawn up again into heaven.

- "...three times" - they say repetition is the greatest form of learning

— The dispensational change from the Law to the Church was not an easy thing for 1st century Jews to swallow

— They had been steeped in the Law from childhood, and the OT was the only Bible they had. It took some patience on God's part to allow for Peter to understand and believe something that was foreign and contrary to the Law

11 And behold, at that moment three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea came up to the house where we were *staying*.

11 And behold, at that moment three men appeared at the house in which we were *staying*, having been sent to me from Caesarea.

11 "At that very moment three men arrived at the house where we were staying. They had been sent to me from Caesarea.

11 And, behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Caesarea unto me.

12 And the Spirit told me to go with them **without misgivings**. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered **the man's** house.

12 The Spirit told me to go with them without misgivings. These six brethren also went with me and we entered the man's house.

12 The Spirit told me to go with them without hesitating. These six brothers went with me, too, and we entered the house of the man from Caesarea.

12 And the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man's house:

- If three random men show up at your house and ask you to come with them, you don't go unless the Lord has already done some work in your heart

- "...without misgivings" - *diakrinō*, without doubting, hesitation, or second-thoughts

— When this word is used in the NT, it primarily refers to our posture toward God in answer to prayer (Cf. Matt 21:21; Mark 11:23; James 1:6-8)

- Why did Peter take six people with him? Because God ordained it first off, and secondly, likely because Peter knew that something big was going to happen, that the Lord was working, but didn't know the details

— He likely thought that God was going to do something that would require witnesses to corroborate (witness) what took place

— There is a biblical doctrine throughout the Bible that by the testimony of 2-3 witnesses, a story will be confirmed:

- For capital punishment (Deut 17:6)
- For a church elder in sin (1 Tim 5:19)

— If these witnesses were not present with Peter to witness the works of God and the conversion of Cornelius, the Jerusalem elders would not have likely believed Peter's account

- "...the man's" - Cornelius

— This was originally what the Jerusalem leadership was upset with Peter for (Cf. v3), and why they called him to give an account

— Peter knew the possible consequences of going into a Gentile's home (Cf. 10:27-28)

13 And he reported to us how he had seen the angel standing in his house, and saying, 'Send *some men* to Joppa and have Simon, who is also called Peter, brought here;

13 And he reported to us how he had seen the angel standing in his house, and saying, 'Send to Joppa and have Simon, who is also called Peter, brought here;

13 Then he told us how he had seen an angel standing in his home and saying, 'Send messengers to Joppa and summon Simon, who is called Peter.

13 And he shewed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter;

- Cornelius was a God-seeker, but he didn't know the gospel and likely did not even know the name Jesus

— So God sent an angel to him with instructions to send for Peter, who would bring the gospel and the name of Jesus to him

14 and he will speak words to you by which you **will be saved**, you and all your household.'

14 and he will speak words to you by which you will be saved, you and all your household.'

14 He will discuss with you how you and your entire household will be saved.'

14 Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved.

- "...will be saved" - future tense; proves that Cornelius, before his personal interaction with Peter, was not saved

— Although unsaved at the time, Cornelius was (Cf. 10:2,22):

- A devout man
- Feared God, along with his family
- Gave many charitable gifts (alms) to the Jewish people
- Prayed to God continually
- A righteous man
- Well-spoken of by the entire nation of Israel (great reputation among the Jews)

— This is a rebuke to both the Calvinistic belief in Total Depravity and the world's belief in Inclusivism (see notes on 10:2)

— Total Depravity believes that unsaved people cannot seek God (they are like corpses or rocks). However, the Bible says differently (Cf. 17:26-27)

- Cornelius responded to general revelation. He recognized there was a God, a Creator, to whom He was accountable. But general revelation cannot save anyone. What Cornelius didn't have was special revelation, which is required for salvation (see notes on 10:2; Rom 1:18-32).

— God, who is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance, is willing to move heaven and earth to get the gospel (specific revelation) to anyone who has responded positively to general revelation.

Verses 15-16 are loaded with theology. Systematic theologians love these types of verses because they provide additional information to events that we already know in the area of soteriology and ecclesiology.

When Peter retold the story of Acts 10 in Acts 11, he adds some details that weren't given in Acts 10, which are absolutely critical to systematic theology. If these additional details were not thrown in to his recount of the events of Acts 10, we would have a number of unanswered questions about salvation and the church.

15 And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them **just as *He did* upon us at the beginning.**

15 And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as *He did* upon us at the beginning.

15 "When I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as he was first given to us.

15 And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning.

- Peter, in his defense, tells the Jerusalem leadership that the Holy Spirit fell upon Cornelius and his household in the same way the Holy Spirit fell upon the apostles on the Day of Pentecost

— If the Jerusalem leadership was going to deny that these Gentiles were now saved, then they'd have to deny that the work of the Holy Spirit did in them at Pentecost, and question their own salvation

- "...just as *He did* upon us" - the salvation of Cornelius and his household/guests reminded him of the events of Pentecost (Acts 2)

- "...at the beginning" - on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2)

16 And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, '**John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'**

16 And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, '**John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'**

16 Then I remembered what the Lord had said: 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'

16 Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost.

- Jesus quoted from Acts 1:5...

— At that point in time, baptism of the Holy Spirit was referred to as future ("not many days from now")

— If you take v15 with v16, it states that Spirit baptism began in Acts 2 (although Spirit baptism is not mentioned in Acts 2)

— Baptism of the Holy Spirit, first received in Acts 2, was the fulfillment of Acts 1:5

- When Cornelius believed (10:43) and the Holy Spirit fell on him (10:44), it reminded Peter of what Jesus said just before His ascension to heaven (1:5)

— Then in v15, Peter makes the point that the same thing that happened to Cornelius happened to us (the apostles). So the baptism of the Holy Spirit had to take place sometime after Acts 1:5, but sometime before Acts 10.

— Without the baptism of the Holy Spirit, you do not have the church. The baptism of the Holy Spirit happens immediately at the time a person puts their faith/trust in Christ for the personal salvation. At that time, Christ invisibly "baptizes" (connects) them with the body of Christ, the church.

— If a person is not baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ, they are not part of the church (see notes on 2:4)

When Did the Church Begin?

1. Christ referred to the church in the future tense (Matt 16:18)
2. Paul referred to the church as a "mystery" (Eph 4-5,9)
3. The church did not exist prior to Acts 1 since Christ became the head of the church (Eph 5:23) after His ascension (Eph 1:20-22)
4. The church did not exist prior to Acts 1 since spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:7; 14:26) only came into existence after His ascension (Eph 4:7-11)
5. The church existed before Paul's conversion in Acts 9 (Acts 5:11; 8:1,3; Rom 16:7)
6. The baptizing (joining/uniting/identifying) ministry of the Holy Spirit began in Acts 2
 - a. 1 Cor 12:13
 - b. Acts 1:5
 - c. Acts 11:15-16
 - d. Acts 2:1-4,37-41

17 Therefore, if God gave them the **same gift** as *He* also gave to us after **believing in the Lord Jesus Christ**, who was I that I could stand in God's way?"

17 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?"

17 Now if God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus, the Messiah, who was I to try to stop God?"

17 Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?

- Peter's defense did not rest on what *he* did, but on what *God* did. If God made no distinction between Jew and Gentile, how could Peter? If God was working, who was he to stand in the way?

- "...same" - equal in quality, equal in rank, and equal in measure

— Peter is acknowledging that what happened to Cornelius is equal to what happened to the apostles on the Day of Pentecost

— God gave the Gentiles the same Holy Spirit that He gave to Jewish believers when they believed on Jesus

— Thus, Peter is saying that Jews and Gentiles are equal in terms of quality, rank, and major. This was a huge change from the past 1500 years, where if a Gentile wanted to walk with God, they had to first become a Jew (proselyte), then follow the Mosaic Law.

- "...gift" - the indwelling of the Holy Spirit; this indwelling is a "gift" from God, and God does not revoke His gifts

— In a secondary sense, the "gift" was a spiritual gift...the gift of tongues

— See note: **Indwelling of the Holy Spirit** in John 7:39; also see [Holy Spirit](#) for a complete explanation of the ministries of the Holy Spirit

- "...believing in the Lord Jesus Christ" - note that Peter identified belief on the Lord Jesus Christ as the only prerequisite to receiving baptism of the Holy Spirit

— If what happened to Cornelius also happened to the Jews in the beginning, then how were the Jews saved in the beginning (Day of Pentecost)? By believing; faith alone.

There were two results from Peter's meeting with Cornelius in Acts 10:

1. It opened the door of the Church for the Gentiles in preparation for Paul's ministry. Peter had to be the one to open the door; from then on, the door stayed open for Gentiles; every time a Gentile is saved, he is baptized into the Body of Christ.
2. Gentile Christianity was recognized as valid (10:45-46; 11:18).

The Verdict of Peter's Critics

18 When they heard this, they **quieted down** and glorified God, saying, "Well then, **God has also granted to the Gentiles the repentance *that leads to life.***"

18 When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, "Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance *that leads to life.*"

18 When they heard this, they calmed down, and praised God by saying, "So God has given repentance that leads to life even to gentiles."

18 When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.

- "...quieted down" - Peter's explanation of the events leading up to and including the meeting in Cornelius' home, and his conclusion that this must have been a work of God, quieted down the wrangling of the Jerusalem leadership (v2-3)

- "...God has also granted to the Gentiles" - a huge change in the growth of the church! After Jews were saved (Pentecost), then Samaritans (half-breed Jews) were saved (Acts 8), now the first Gentiles are added to the church

— "granted" - *didōmi*, a gift; to give something. It doesn't refer to something that is given with coercion or rammed down your throat against your will.

— Calvinists use this verse to argue for their doctrine of Unconditional Election. They believe "granted" here means that gave to these Gentiles the "gift of faith" (even though faith is never mentioned) so they could believe.

— However the gift here is not faith, as Calvinism argues. The gift here is the "drawing" or convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit, which convinced Cornelius that the gospel presented to him by Peter was true and worthy of belief by faith.

— Is repentance a "gift" (v17) from God? No, but the opportunity for man to repent is a gift.

— Similar to belief and faith, which are not gifts from God, repentance is a non-meritorious, volitional response to God's truth. It is repeatedly found in the active voice because we have a choice either to change our minds or not.

— We can resist the truth God is showing us. In fact, unbelievers do this all the time, and unfortunately many believers do so as well.

- "...the repentance *that leads* to life" - it is clear from the context that "repentance that leads to life" refers to Gentiles' faith in Christ (Cf. Acts 10:43; 11:17). See notes regarding repentance in Acts 2:38.

— In light of the fact that in his previous sermons Peter conditioned salvation for Jews solely on repentance, which in context is clearly changing one's mind/attitude about Jesus (Cf. 2:38, 3:19; 5:31), it can only be concluded that Peter considered calling Jews to change their minds/attitudes about Jesus Christ to be identical with calling Gentiles to faith in Him.

— Moreover, since Luke does not cite Peter as mentioning repentance anywhere in this account (Cf. 10:34—11:17), the response of the Jewish believers at Jerusalem means that they considered "repentance unto life" to be the same as faith in Jesus Christ.

- Peter's explanation satisfied his critics, who agreed God was saving Gentiles simply by faith in Jesus Christ, just as He was saving Jews. They also agreed that they should no longer think of Gentiles as unclean.

— However, not all those who accepted Peter's explanation understood the larger issue: God had created a new entity, the Church, and had begun dealing with mankind on a different basis: no longer under the old Mosaic Covenant, the Church was now governed by the New Covenant.

— It was no longer necessary for Gentiles to come to God through Judaism or follow the Mosaic Law. Even today, many Christians do not understand the implications of this change, or its application in daily life.

(7) Church at Antioch (11:19-30)

(A) Birth and maturation (11:19-26)

19 So then those who were **scattered** because of the **persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen** made **their** way to **Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone.**

19 So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone.

19 Now the people who were scattered by the persecution that started because of Stephen went as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews.

19 Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phoenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only.

- The scene now picks up where 8:4 left off, but the focus now shifts to Antioch of Syria.

From here, the Church launched major missionary offensives to "the uttermost parts of the earth."

- "...scattered" - the church at Jerusalem "scattered" (Cf. 8:4) after Stephen was martyred, when Saul went on his persecution rampage

— The scattered believers initially went to Judea and Samaria, but as persecution continued outward from Jerusalem, eventually some even scattered to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and (Syrian) Antioch

- "...persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen" - Saul of Tarsus, who was present at the stoning of Stephen, launched a wave of persecution against the church after Stephen was martyred (Cf. 8:3-4)

- "...their" - the people referenced here were Jews, who were only evangelizing other Jews

- "...Phoenicia" - strip on the Mediterranean coast between Caesarea, northward 100 miles, halfway to Antioch

- "...Cyprus" - a rich and productive island Southwest of Seleucia

- "...speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone" - these scattered believers are not yet aware of the events surrounding the salvation of Cornelius, the first Gentile member of the church, or Peter's testimony to the Jerusalem leadership (Cf. v1-18)
- "the word" - *logos*, sometimes used to refer to Christ (Cf. John 1:14) and sometimes used to refer to Scripture (Cf. Gal 6:6)

Every Geographical Location in Acts/Epistles



20 But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and **Cyrene**, who came to **Antioch** and **began speaking to the Greeks as well**, preaching the good news of the **Lord Jesus**.

20 But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and **began** speaking to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus.

20 But among them were some men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began proclaiming the Lord Jesus even to the Hellenistic Jews.

20 And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus.

- "...Cyrene" - located on the south shore of Mediterranean in North Africa, between Carthage and Egypt. Simon of Cyrene, who carried Jesus' cross, was from here.

- "...Antioch" - at this time Antioch was the third largest city in the Roman world after Rome and Alexandria
- Now that Peter had opened the door to the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius, it was possible for other Jewish believers to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles. Peter no longer had to be involved.
- "...speaking to the Greeks as well" - word about Gentile salvation evidently spread quickly because these men began evangelizing Gentiles as well as Jews
- Once Peter "opened the door" with the "keys of the kingdom" the gospel was free to be presented to Gentiles everywhere
- "...Lord Jesus" - a very Gentile way of referring to Jesus; the Jews would call Him "Son of David" or "King of Israel," but they wouldn't refer to Him as "Lord Jesus"

21 And **the hand of the Lord was with them**, and **a large number** who **believed** turned to the Lord.

21 And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord.

21 The hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

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

- These are the conversions happening in Phoenicia, Cyprus, and primarily Antioch

- "...the hand of the Lord was with them" - an expression found frequently in Ezra (Cf. Ezra 8:18)

- These were people who were walking directly in the center of the will of God, in both their Jewish and their Gentile evangelism

- "...a large number" - a progress report; this was a time of very fruitful evangelism, noted by the multiple mentions of large numbers coming to Christ (Cf. v24,26)

- Luke's purpose for writing Acts to Theophilus was to affirm him in his belief, and document for him the birth and growth of the church numerically, geographically, and ethnically

- This passages does all three...

- Numerically: a "large number" of people believed (v21); "considerable numbers" were added to the church; "considerable numbers" were taught (v26)
- Geographically: the movement of the church from Jerusalem to Antioch, and eventually to Rome
- Ethnically: from an off-shoot of Judaism exclusively to the beginning of Gentile domination

- "...believed" - a circumstantial participle of manner, meaning the manner in which they "turned to the Lord" was by believing



Antioch

The first widespread evangelization of the Gentiles was in Antioch. What happened in Cornelius' house was limited framework for the time being, but in Antioch, we have the first extensive Gentile evangelism. As a result, Antioch became the mother church of Gentile Christianity and its center for evangelism.

The city of Antioch was founded in 300 BC by Seleucus Nicator, and was one of the five cities given this name by the Seleucids. This city was built on the Orontes River, and it later became the capital of the Seleucid Kingdom. It was 300 miles north of Jerusalem, and became part of the Roman Empire in 64 BC. Rome declared Antioch a Free City, with its own municipal government, and it became the third largest city in the Empire. The largest city was Rome; next was Alexandria; then Antioch, with a population of somewhere between 500,000 and 800,000. There was a large Greek speaking Syrian majority, and a Jewish minority.

The modern city is called Antakiyeh. As a city, it had quite a reputation, and was called Antioch the Great, Antioch the Beautiful, The Queen of the East, and Antioch on the Orontes. It was a major center of pagan worship. Its patron god was Tyche. There was also the worship of Ashtarte or the Ashteroth, which incorporated immoral festivals and religious ritual prostitution. Only five miles away was the town of Daphne, which was the center of worship of Apollo and Artemis. It was noted for its licentiousness and its pleasure-seeking temple. It was utterly morally corrupt.

Later, Antioch became the center of Christianity. It had a School of Theology, and it became the city and church of two of the early Church fathers: Ignatius and John Chrysostom. So, this was Antioch which became the mother of Gentile Christianity, as Jerusalem was the mother of the Messianic Jewish Movement.

22 The news about them reached the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas off to **Antioch**.

22 The news about them reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch.

22 When the church in Jerusalem heard this news, they sent Barnabas all the way to Antioch.

22 Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch.

- A report reaches Jerusalem regarding Gentile evangelism; they began to hear news of mass evangelism of the Gentiles in Antioch. In response, they sent Barnabas.

- Barnabas was an excellent man for this mission (Cf. 4:36-37) since he, along with some of the other evangelists at Antioch, was from Cyprus

- "...Antioch" - a very corrupt city (Cf. Corinth)

- The Bible Knowledge Commentary quotes the Roman poet Juvenal saying: "The sewage of the Syrian Orontes [Antioch] has for a long time been discharged into the Tiber [River, in Rome]." By this, he meant that Antioch was so corrupt that it was impacting Rome, more than 1300 miles away.

- The center of influence begins to shift from Jerusalem to Antioch, which then becomes a primary base for the churches and Paul's launching point for each of his three missionary journeys

23 Then when he arrived and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and *began* to **encourage** them all with resolute heart to remain *true* to the Lord;

23 Then when he arrived and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and *began* to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain *true* to the Lord;

23 When he arrived, he rejoiced to see what the grace of God had done, and with hearty determination he kept encouraging all of them to remain faithful to the Lord,

23 Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.

- Barnabas recognized that God's unmerited favor was actively being poured out on the church of Antioch

- Notice that Barnabas didn't bring in his legalistic framework for this new church. He didn't correct or direct them, but instead he encouraged them in the second tense of their salvation.

- Keep in mind the secular, corrupt nature of Antioch at that time (see note on v22). What the fledgling church needed at that time was encouragement to reject the trappings of the world around them and walk with the Lord.

- "...encourage" - one of the gifts that the Holy Spirit gives to the church

- Some Christians believe they have the gift of criticism, which is the opposite of encouragement. They are always tearing the church or other believers down, rather than building them up.

24 for he was a **good** man, and **full of the Holy Spirit** and faith. And considerable numbers were added to the Lord.

24 for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord.

24 because he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith. And so a large number of people was brought to the Lord.

24 For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord.

- "...good" - *agathos*, same Greek word used for "goodness" in the fruit of the Spirit (Cf. Gal 5:22)

- "...full of the Holy Spirit" - one of the qualifications for a deacon (Cf. 6:3); Barnabas was walking in the Spirit, not in the flesh

- Even more people became believers because of Barnabas' ministry to these Christians

- Barnabas becomes the pastor there and he needs an assistant. He knows a good one...

25 And he left for Tarsus **to look for** Saul;

25 And he left for Tarsus to look for Saul;

25 Then Barnabas left for Tarsus to look for Saul.

25 Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul:

- After 10 years of absence, Saul comes back into the narrative; he had earlier gone to Tarsus (9:30)

- He was an ideal choice for this job, since God had given him a special ministry to evangelize the Gentiles (22:21)
- Barnabas was the first to recognize the genuineness of Saul's conversion
- It is interesting that when he goes to Antioch and sees action, he does not return to Jerusalem; instead he tracks down Saul in Tarsus
 - "...to look for" - *anazēteō*, to make a diligent search; only other usage in the NT is to describe Mary and Joseph looking for Jesus, who was lost (Cf. Luke 2:44-45)
- It's likely that Barnabas realizes how significant Paul will be in the growth and spread of the church, that he is intently and urgently looking for him in Tarsus
- Barnabas wanted to bring Saul back to Antioch with him to teach the massive flock that was growing in Antioch

26 and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And for an entire year they met with the church and **taught considerable numbers of people**; and the disciples were first called **Christians** in Antioch.

26 and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.

26 When he found him, he brought him to Antioch, and for a whole year they were guests of the church and taught many people. It was in Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians.

26 And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.

- This was likely about 43 AD

- Paul never just visited a city, started a church, got a few people saved, and left

- Paul was an obstetrician, but he was also a pediatrician. He never just got people saved and moved on, he often stayed around for month or years to teach them and grow their faith.

- "...taught considerable numbers of people" - this is the third time a general progress report is given for the church at Antioch (Cf. v21,24)

- "...Christians" - *christianos*, "a partisan of Christ"; "those belonging to Christ's party" or "Christ followers"; "a little Christ"; first time this term is used to describe believers

- The term was given to believers by the Gentiles, since Jews would not have used such a term; Jewish believers were called "Nazarenes"

- This name is not to point out that they were "little christs" but rather because to the outside observer they acted very much like Jesus Christ

- The moral character of these people emulated Jesus of Nazareth

— People were beginning to distinguish the Christians as a group, both from religious Jews and from pagan Gentiles (Cf. 1 Cor 10:32)

— The term is used 3x in the NT, and in each case Christians do not use the word of themselves (Cf. 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16). Before believers were called Christians in Antioch, they were called "The Way" (Cf. 9:2; 19:9,23; 22:4; 24:14,22).

27 Now at this time *some* prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch.

27 Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch.

27 At that time some prophets from Jerusalem came down to Antioch.

27 And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch.

- This verse begins to show the difference between the Jewish church in Jerusalem and the mostly Gentile church in Antioch

— Instead of the disciples traveling down to Antioch from Jerusalem, prophets went to Antioch

- "...came down" - even though Antioch is "up" (north) from Jerusalem, Luke writes that these prophets "came down" because Jerusalem is at the highest elevation in Israel

28 One of them, named Agabus, stood up and indicated by the Spirit that there would definitely be a **severefamine** all over **theworld**. **And this took place in the reign of Claudius**.

28 One of them named Agabus stood up and *began* to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the *reign* of Claudius.

28 One of them named Agabus got up and predicted by the Spirit that there would be a severe famine all over the world. This happened during the reign of Claudius.

28 And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar.

- Notice that Luke adds that Agabus' prophecy actually took place, after the prophecy was given, and Luke gives the approximate timeframe

- Antioch would become very benevolent due to the prophecy of Agabus

- "...severe famine" - there were a series of four severe famines in the Roman Empire under Claudius (44-54 AD)

— This famine is known to have come specifically in 46 AD; Josephus recorded many famines between 44-49 AD

- "...the world" - *oikoumenē*, in contrast to *cosmos*, refers to the inhabited world

— *Oikoumenē* can also, in some contexts, refer to the entire world (Cf. Luke 4:5; Acts 17:31; Rev 12:9); in other contexts, such as here, it refers to the known/inhabited world (Cf. Luke

2:1)

- "...And this took place in the *reign* of Claudius" - Josephus records this famine in *Antiquities*, 20.1.3; 20.2.1,5

— Agabus was recognized as a prophet of God because his short-term prophecies came to pass with absolute 100% consistency

— The veracity and authenticity of a prophet is gauged by whether their predictions come to pass. In this case, with Agabus' prophecy, we have outside historical confirmation that it indeed did.

— There is no room for a true prophet to be wrong. Prophets do not "grow into their gift." They must be 100% correct 100% of the time in order to be considered a prophet (Cf. Deut 13:1-5; 18:21-22).

— Agabus later provided another prophecy (Cf. 21:10-11)

29 And to the extent that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send *a contribution* for the relief of the brothers *and sisters* living in Judea.

29 And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send *a contribution* for the relief of the brethren living in Judea.

29 So all of the disciples decided they would send a contribution to the brothers living in Judea, as they were able,

29 Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea:

- The prophecy of Agabus created a spirit of giving in the church of Antioch

— The effect of the famine was especially felt in Jerusalem where the Church had been persecuted, decimated, and hurt

— The Christians in Antioch showed love for and unity with their brothers in Jerusalem by sending a gift of relief money

— This isn't communism or marxism...it's compassionate capitalism. God put into the hearts of those who had means to generously give to other believers who had need

— This is the first public collection taken by one church to help another. Later, Paul collected offerings from Gentile churches to help Christians in Jerusalem (24:17; Rom 15:25-26; 1 Cor 16:1; 2 Cor 8; 9)

— This is God's purpose for blessing us financially (Cf. 2 Cor 8:14)

— In Rom 15:25-27, Paul talks about the financial gifts given by the Gentile churches in Macedonian and Achaia to the church at Jerusalem because they were indebted to the Jews in regards to spiritual things so they needed to minister to them in material things.

30 And they did this, sending it with Barnabas and Saul to the **elders**.

30 And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders.

30 by sending it through Barnabas and Saul to the elders.

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

- Jerusalem sent Barnabas, who blessed the church at Antioch; Antioch sent relief money to bless the church in Jerusalem

- The leaders chose Saul and Barnabas to carry the gift to Jerusalem. A bit of irony: the hands that previously attacked and persecuted them now brought them financial relief.

- "...elders" - *presbyteros*, it can refer either to older men (1 Tim 5:1), or to officers in the church (Titus 1:5). In this context, it probably refers to church leaders

- It is used interchangeably with "bishop"; first mention in Acts (Cf. 20:17,28; 1 Tim 4:14; 5:17)

- The fact that Barnabas and Saul delivered this offering to the elders in the Jerusalem church shows that the apostles are beginning to be phased out (Cf. Eph 2:20)

- Many of the apostles left Jerusalem and traveled to other geographic locations to spread the gospel. They began to hand off the leadership of the church to the elders.

- Notice that the offering was not given to judges, kings, patriarchs, prophets, or tribes...because that was how Israel functioned. This offering was given by one church to another, which functions under a completely different leadership structure.

- The visit of Saul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to deliver the gift probably took place in 46 AD, when Judea suffered a severe famine. This so-called "famine visit to Jerusalem" is probably what Paul referred to in Gal 2:1-10.