

Acts of the Apostles – Chapter 11

Peter Explains His Actions

11:1 The apostles and the believers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. 2 So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him 3 and said, “You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.”

When Peter returned to Jerusalem, the news that he had gone into the house and ate with Gentiles or the uncircumcised by the circumcised or the Jews. It is interesting that even without email or snail mail, the news had traveled quickly to the Apostles and believers throughout Judea. The fact that Peter had eaten with Gentiles should have been an amazing thing but it appears it wasn't acceptable to the Jews.

“This reaction of the Christian Jews shows how significant the change was that God initiated in Acts 10. The change said, to the Gentiles, “You don't have to become Jews first, and put yourself under the Law of Moses first. Repent and believe, and you can come to Jesus.” But it also said to the Jewish followers of Jesus, “Receive your Gentile brothers and sisters as full members of the family of God. They aren't inferior to you in any way.” (Guzik)

11:4 Starting from the beginning, Peter told them the whole story: 5 “I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. I saw something like a large sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to where I was. 6 I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, reptiles and birds. 7 Then I heard a voice telling me, ‘Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.’

8 “I replied, ‘Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’

9 “The voice spoke from heaven a second time, ‘Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.’ 10 This happened three times, and then it was all pulled up to heaven again.

Peter is being very thorough as he recounts the events leading up to the baptism of the Centurion and his family. Peter is not denying what had happened. He is telling them what had happened in great detail. He is making it a point to let them know that he did not act on his own. He did what he did because of direct orders from Heaven.

11:11 “Right then three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea stopped at the house where I was staying. 12 The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered the man's house. 13 He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, ‘Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. 14 He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.’

In writing this chapter Luke could have copied the previous chapter. In these verses, Peter tells them how God is in control of the entire encounter. God had prepared things in Joppa, as well as Caesarea. Peter told them that he went with the men by the authority of the Holy Spirit.

11:15 "As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. 16 Then I remembered what the Lord had said: 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' 17 So if God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God's way?"

18 When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, "So then, even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life."

Peter said that the Holy Spirit came upon the Gentiles just like it did for Peter and the other apostles and believers on the day of Pentecost. We have been told by John the Baptist that Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit in Matthew 3:11 and Jesus told the apostles that they will also baptize with the Holy Spirit in Acts 1:5. Matthew 3:11 says, "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." Acts 1:5 says, "For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." Isaiah 49:6 says that the Messiah will bring salvation to the Gentiles. Since they believed that Jesus was the Messiah then how could they argue with the conversion of Gentiles. Peter finishes his explanation with "And since God gave these Gentiles the same gift he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to stand in God's way". The response of the Jewish apostles and disciples was they stopped objecting and praised God. In the end, they accepted the Gentiles as brothers or joint/fellow heirs. Romans 8:17 tells us, "Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory."

The Church in Antioch

11:19 Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. 20 Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. 21 The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

When the Great Persecution started, most of the believers were in Jerusalem. The persecution caused the spreading of the Gospel to other places, like Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch. They spread the message only to Jews but these verses tell us that they began speaking to the Greeks. These people were Gentiles. The result of being forced out of Jerusalem was growth in the number of believers.

"One might say that Jerusalem was all about *religion*; Rome was all about *power*; Alexandria was all about *intellect*, and Athens was all about *philosophy*. Adding to that, one might say that Antioch was all about *business* and *immorality*." (Guzik)

When Peter took the Gospel to Cornelius at Caesarea, he was a devout man (Acts 10:2) and one who feared God. When the men of Cyprus and Cyrene brought the Gospel to Antioch, it came to an utterly pagan city.

11:22 News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. 23 When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. 24 He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord. 25 Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, 26 and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.

Again without modern communication tools, the news of the successfully reaching the Greeks for Christ made its way back to Jerusalem. So the Christian leadership sent Barnabas to Antioch. When Barnabas saw what was happening in Antioch:

- a. He witnessed the grace of God.
- b. He rejoiced.
- c. He began encouraging them.
- d. He went to Tarsus to get Saul.
- e. He found him.
- f. He brought him to Antioch.

Verses 21, 24 and 26 tell us that God was blessing the outreach to the Gentiles or Greeks in Antioch. They stayed in Antioch for one year. The disciples were first called “Christians” in Antioch.

27 During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) 29 The disciples, as each one was able, decided to provide help for the brothers and sisters living in Judea. 30 This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

Prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. Agabus, one of these prophets told them about a great famine would come during the reign of Claudius.

“We know from other sources that Claudius’s principate as marked by a succession of bad harvests and consequent scarcity in various parts of the empire – in Rome, Greece, and Egypt as well as in Judaea.” (Bruce)

The Christians or believers gave according to their means. After they collected the offering they sent it to the elders with Barnabas and Saul.

Additional references:

Boice, James Montgomery *Acts, an Expository Commentary* (Baker Books, Grand Rapids Michigan, 1997).

Bruce, F.F. *The Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1988).