

The Book of Acts
Chapter 11

Acts 11:15-17

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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.

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?

I. Review of chapter 10

1. Last lesson, we started by looking at the shift in ministry focus. Jesus had told the apostles to go **only** to the lost sheep of the house of Israel and avoid Gentiles and Samaritans (Mat 10:5-6), but that shift changed with two visions from God.
2. The Roman centurion Cornelius was told by an angel to call for Peter, and Peter saw a vision and heard the Spirit telling him to go. So he went.
3. Peter preached to Cornelius' household about Jesus' healing and deliverance works in Judea and Galilee, and His death, resurrection, and remission of sins in His name.
4. And while Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell, they spoke with tongues just like had happened for the Jews, and Peter baptized them all in the name of the Lord.

II. Promised to all nations

A. All families and nations blessed by Abraham's Seed

1. The Apostles had received the mighty revelation of the gospel of Jesus and were convinced that salvation was only in His name, through His death and resurrection.
2. There was no question about that.
3. But the majority of the Jews did not yet understand fully that salvation in Jesus Christ was for Gentiles as well as for Jews.
4. For centuries, they had taught that Gentiles could have no part with the Lord except if they were circumcised.
5. But gradually, God began to reveal to them that He had opened the door of His kingdom to men of all nations.
6. In the early days of Jesus' ministry, His reach to Gentiles was limited to a few Gentiles who crossed the boundary of the lost sheep of the house of Israel, solely because of their demonstration of **great faith**.
7. Like the Roman centurion, and the Syrophenician woman whom Jesus said had great faith.
8. Do you remember the eight levels of faith we taught about:
 - 1) No faith
 - 2) Little faith
 - 3) Weak faith

- 4) Measure of faith
 - 5) Gift of faith
 - 6) Strong in faith
 - 7) Great faith (two Gentiles)
 - 8) Full of faith
9. Faith was what brought those Gentiles across the boundary early.
 10. But God had promised Abraham that his seed would bless **all families** of the earth:
*Gen 12:3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall **all families** of the earth be blessed.*
 11. To make sure that was clear, God said, "**all nations**":
*Gen 22:18 And in thy seed shall **all the nations** of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.*
 12. That is what Paul would later refer to in his preaching to Gentiles:
*Gal 3:8 And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify **the heathen** through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall **all nations** be blessed.*
 13. The heathen, all nations would be blessed through Abraham's seed, which is Christ:
*Gal 3:16 Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to **thy seed, which is Christ.***
- B. For the Jews only or the Jews first?
1. When Paul began ministering across the world on missionary journeys, his practice was to start ministry in a city in a Jewish synagogue in order to get an audience with people who were familiar with the promises of God's word.
 2. Take Corinth as an example
Acts 18:4-6
4 And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks.
5 And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ.
*6 And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: **from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles.***
 3. That is how the church ended up being mostly Gentile believers as it is today.
- III. Peter retells the story (verses 1-18)
1. The Lord had revealed to Peter His acceptance of Gentiles in the vision on the housetop in Joppa, and that prepared him to answer the call of Cornelius.
 2. But the Apostles and brethren in Jerusalem had not yet received this revelation, and consequently were greatly concerned when they learned he had gone into the home of Gentiles and had preached to them and baptized them.
Acts 11:1-3
11 And the apostles and brethren that were in Judaea heard that the Gentiles had also

received the word of God.

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

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

3. **Contended:** Greek diakrino, separate thoroughly. Oppose, decide, judge.
4. It often seems more difficult to unlearn long-standing traditions than to learn the truths of God.
5. Traditions tend to blind people to truth, or at least it keeps some people from pursuing more truth.
6. The Law of Moses forbade relations with foreign people to prevent their being corrupted by the idolatry in Canaan.
7. But a deeper study of God's Word would reveal that God's plan of redemption in Christ included men of all nations and races:
*Isa 49:6 And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a **light to the Gentiles**, that thou mayest be **my salvation unto the end of the earth.***
8. Now that Israel had been restored to God, God's light and salvation were now being shined to the Gentiles and to the ends of the earth.
9. So now that Peter was called in question for going into the home of Gentiles and eating with them, He stood before a council of the Apostles and other ministering brethren and rehearsed the whole story to them, beginning with the vision:
Acts 11:5-10
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 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.
7 And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay and eat.
8 But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth.
9 But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.
10 And this was done three times: and all were drawn up again into heaven.
10. He retold it as it happened, that as soon as the vision was ended, there was a knock on the door:
Acts 11:11-12
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 bade me go with them, nothing doubting. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man's house:
11. Three from Caesarea, six from Joppa plus Peter, journeyed to the home of Cornelius.

12. Peter then told of the vision that Cornelius had seen:
Acts 11:13-14
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;
*14 Who shall tell thee words, **whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved.***
 13. It doesn't matter what the person looks like, their legal background, their addictions, or as in this case, their nationality or ethnicity, when someone asks how to be saved, we must tell them and lead them.
 14. It is odd how people operate, but it is still true today. If God truly drove you to do something different, people will want an explanation.
 15. And this is the proof that this was from God:
Acts 11:15-17
15 And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning.
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.
*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?***
 16. Peter had already been called to answer the Sanhedrin elders—the leading Jewish authority in Jerusalem—about preaching Jesus more than once and gave this same response to them.
 17. If God saves them, who am I to withstand God?
 18. That was an excellent explanation that gained acceptance with the church:
Acts 11:18 When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.
 19. Repentance, baptism in Jesus' name, and receiving the Holy Ghost, were all granted to the Gentiles.
- IV. The Church in Antioch of Syria (Verses 19-30)
1. The last part of chapter 11 sets the stage for the next direction Acts will take. Remember, Acts 1-12 focuses on the ministry of the Apostle Peter, and Acts 13-28 focuses on the ministry of the Apostle Paul.
 2. Verses 19-21 let us know of the spread of the gospel to the city of Antioch and the starting of a Gentile congregation there, and reintroduces Saul. This new church was needing leadership and teaching:
Acts 11:19-21
*19 Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but **unto the Jews only.***
*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.*
21 And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.

3. **[map: Cyrene, Cyprus, Antioch]**
4. The new growing congregation got the attention of the church in Jerusalem, and the home church wanted to send help.
5. They chose a man who had proved his kindness and wisdom plenty of times before—Barnabus from **Cyprus**:
Acts 11:22-24
*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.*
*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**.*
*24 For he was a good man, and **full of the Holy Ghost and of faith**: and much people was added unto the Lord.*
6. The Lord blessed the ministry of these missionaries to the Greeks, and a great number of them were converted to Jesus.
7. When the “ears of the church” at Jerusalem church learned of the growth of the church, the Apostles had the commission for the laying of the foundation of the New Testament church, so after investigating Antioch, Barnabas was very pleased.
8. But the growth of the church was so expansive, Barnabas decided he needed help to teach all these new converts.
9. So he traveled the short distance to Tarsus to get help.
10. **[Map Antioch to Tarsus]**
11. *Acts 11:25-26*
*25 **Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul**: [one of the most important events in the New Testament]*
*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**.*
12. Antioch was the big city in the area, the capital city of the Roman province of Syria. It was the third largest city of the Roman Empire in the first century¹ with a population of around 200,000.
13. Barnabas no doubt remembered Saul's great skill with the Scriptures and his boldness when preaching in Damascus.
14. He was also convinced his special calling from Jesus, as he reported to the apostles in Jerusalem when he spoke up for him the first time:
Acts 9:27 But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.
15. This was the beginning of the great missionary work of Saul of Tarsus, who became Paul the Apostle.

¹ The Archaeology Study Bible, Crossway, Wheaton, IL, 2017. P. 1618.

16. The city of Antioch became the headquarters of Paul's missionary endeavors, rather than Jerusalem.
17. And it was there that the disciples of Jesus first came to be called Christians.
18. They were "called" or labeled Christians by outsiders, not necessarily by themselves.
19. They had been referred to each other as brothers, believers, disciples, followers of the way.
20. But now outsiders saw them as followers of Christ so they called them Christians. That is much like the followers of Herod were called Herodians.
21. After Saul and Barnabas had labored together in Antioch for a year, a situation arose which made it necessary for them to journey to leave and head for Jerusalem.

V. Famine response

1. *Acts 11:27-30*

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

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

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

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

2. Among the prophets who came to Antioch from Jerusalem was Agabus who prophesied of a dearth that would soon spread over the land.
3. This is the first mention of the ministry of New Testament prophets. From this passage and from 1 Cor 14:3, we see the role of the New Testament prophet was part preaching, exhorting, edifying, comforting, and in some cases, foretelling of future events.
4. A dearth, or famine, was coming and Agabus prophesied it was to have dire effects on the saints of Judea.
5. History records that such a famine occurred during the reign of Claudius that occurred between 44-48 AD²
6. The church of Antioch chose to send their offering to the elders of the church in Jerusalem, meaning the Apostles, by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.
7. Jerusalem was the founding church which had sent out preachers who eventually started a home missions church in Antioch.
8. Now the new church was helping support the home church.
9. There are other times when Paul took offerings to Jerusalem to help the poor saints in Jerusalem.
10. This is not unlike how churches still send donations to victims of natural disasters in other places.

² Ibid. p. 1617-1619.