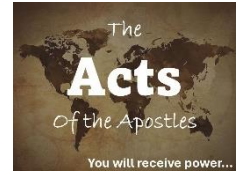




The Amazing and Explosive Growth of the Church in Antioch! Acts 11:1-30 (Lesson #17)



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OUTLINE of Chapter 11:

- 1) Word gets back to Jerusalem that Gentiles have been saved (11:1).
- 2) When Peter arrives in Jerusalem he is immediately confronted by Jewish believers for his association with Gentiles (11:2-3).
- 3) Peter explains to the Jewish believers the events that led up to him going to Cornelius' home (11:4-12a).
- 4) Peter then explains everything that happened at Cornelius's home, in particular how the Gentiles had received the same Holy Spirit as the Jews received (11:12b-17).
- 5) These Jewish believers after hearing all that had happened praised God for offering salvation to the Gentiles (11:18).
- 6) Peter next picks up describing what happened with those who had been scattered following Stephen's death, how they preached the gospel in Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch (11:19).
- 7) Peter then describes how in Antioch, believers from Cyprus and Cyrene started sharing the gospel with Greeks and a great number of them were saved (11:20-21).
- 8) Word gets back to the church in Jerusalem and they send Barnabas to investigate (11:22).
- 9) Barnabas saw the grace of God in their midst and that many were being saved (11:23-24).
- 10) Barnabas then decides to go and search for Saul and bring him back to Antioch where for a whole year they both taught the disciples (11:25-26).
- 11) A prophet named Agabus came from Jerusalem to Antioch and foretold by the Spirit of a great famine that would sweep the Roman empire (11:27-28).
- 12) The believers decided to send relief to the brothers in Judea by the hands of Saul and Barnabas (11:29-30).

11:1 Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. **2** So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, **3** "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them." **4** But Peter began and explained it to them in order: **5** "I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision, something like a great sheet descending, being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to me. **6** Looking at it closely, I observed animals and beasts of prey and reptiles and birds of the air. **7** And I heard a voice saying to me, 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat.' **8** But I said, 'By no means, Lord; for nothing common or unclean has ever entered my mouth.' **9** But the voice answered a second time from heaven, 'What God has made clean, do not call common.'

Vs 1 - As we might imagine word that the Gentiles had come to faith in Jesus Christ spread like wildfire.

Word made it back to the apostles. As best we understand many apostles were still in Jerusalem, although we did observe Peter traveling around, teaching, and miracles being performed at his hands Acts 9-10.

But it was not just the apostles, word of the Gentiles coming to faith in Jesus Christ spread throughout Judea, among the believers (Jewish and Jewish proselytes).

Vs 2-3 - Some time after the events that occurred in Caesarea, when Cornelius, his friends, and family members, placed faith in Jesus Christ and were baptized, sometime after that, Peter proceeded back to Jerusalem.

The exact reference to "they of the circumcision" is disagreed upon by Scholars. Some believing this was a small minority, while others believing at this point it was a large majority.

It seems to me that it is likely the majority position of Jewish believers for this is how they were raised.

Whoever the group, you can see the charge, you went in to uncircumcised men and even ate with them! Sharing a meal together, especially in this ancient culture was a special sign of fellowship. Those of the **circumcision party** were not impressed.

We will continue to run into Jews who clung to the Old Testament rituals. We will see them again in Acts 15.

Following the first missionary journey, (which we will talk about soon enough) Paul and Barnabas were back in Antioch and we read:

"1 ¶ But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." 2 And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question." (Ac 15:1-2 ESV)

Then we read about the council meeting, for now just one point from that meeting:

"4 When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them. 5 But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses." (Ac 15:4-5 ESV)

We also read about these men in Gal 2:

"11 ¶ But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. 12 For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. 13 And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. 14 But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?" (Ga 2:11-14 ESV)

When Peter arrives back in Jerusalem, in spite of the fact that he is an apostle and even the leader of the apostles, these people, the **circumcised party, criticized him.**

Criticized, the Greek word is **διακρίνω (diakrino)** and it means to **doubt**, to **judge**, to **contend with**. It is more than likely this was a stern rebuke, they criticized his decision, they contended and disputed with Peter over his involvement with Gentiles.

You can see their charge: **"You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them."**

This reflects the Jewish perspective during Jesus' time. Peter summed up this position last week in (Acts 10:28).

Vs 4-9 - So Peter began to explain to them all what had happened. Notice Luke tells us **he did so in order**. The Greek word means **chronological order**.

Peter walked them **through the details**, through the **timeline of events** and provided them with a **blow-by-blow overview** of what happened with Cornelius and his family.

He started by recounting how he was in Joppa, he does not tell them everything, but he walks through key events, key components of the story.

He explains what the vision entailed: Something like a massive linen cloth was being let down by its four corners, but notice what he says, **it came down to me**. This personalizes the experience even beyond what we initially saw last week. Peter tells those of the circumcision party, that the linen cloth came right down to me!

Peter provides the additional details that he looked at it closely! Upon his inspection, he sees **animals and beasts of prey and reptiles and birds of the air**. He sees a mixed bag of clean and unclean animals.

Next he tells them about the voice he hears while he is in a trance, while he is having this vision: **‘Rise, Peter; kill and eat.’**

Then Peter recounts his response to the heavenly command: **‘By no means, Lord; for nothing common or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’**

We talked about the paradox of saying no Lord, so I will pass over that. But Peter is simply retelling what happened.

Peter retells the response that came from heaven: **‘What God has made clean, do not call common.’**

10 This happened three times, and all was drawn up again into heaven. 11 And behold, at that very moment three men arrived at the house in which we were, sent to me from Caesarea. 12 And the Spirit told me to go with them, making no distinction. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man’s house. 13 And he told us how he had seen the angel stand in his house and say, ‘Send to Joppa and bring Simon who is called Peter; 14 he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household.’ 15 As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. 16 And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ 17 If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God’s way?” 18 When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life."

Vs 10 - Peter explains that this happened, three times, and then the linen cloth was drawn up into heaven.

Again, Peter is simply retelling what occurred.

Vs 11 - And behold! At that **very moment**, three men arrived at Simon the tanner’s house.

Notice these three men had been sent to me. We wonder if Peter is referring to Cornelius sent them or the Lord sent them, for as it turns out both are true. **BUT, Peter’s point is these men were sent to find me.**

Vs 12 - Then Peter says, there on the housetop, the Spirit told me to go with them, making on distinction.

Here is what we read last week:

“19 ¶ And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are looking for you. 20 Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them."” (Ac 10:19-20 ESV)

Last week we were told the spirit said: **“without hesitation” διακρίνω (diakrino), μηδείς (medeis)**. The Greek literally means **without judging, without doubting, or without disputing**.

Here it **appears** we are being told something slightly different, but in the Greek, it is the **exact same two words**. Go with them without disputing. **μηδείς (medeis), διακρίνω (diakrino)**. Peter is retelling what the Spirit conveyed to him.

Vs 13-14 - He skips a lot here to get to the punchline. Upon their arrival at Cornelius’ home, he outlined how he had seen an angel stand in his house. I suspect if an angel can go in his Cornelius’ home, so can a Jew. 😊

This angel had given him the command to: ‘Send to Joppa and bring Simon who is called Peter; 14 he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household.’

We looked at this last week. A few points worthy of restatement:

- 1) **God for the time has chosen to use men to share the gospel with men. God could have used the angel and it would have been much “easier” if you will, but that is not God’s plan. Not for now.**
- 2) **This Simon will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household.**
 - a. Cornelius was a good man, who did many good things, who sought God based on the light he had, but that was not enough, he needed to hear about and respond to Jesus.
 - b. His honest pursuit did get God’s attention.
 - c. But like all men and women, he needed to be saved which is only accomplished by placing faith in Jesus Christ!
 - d. Saved is a future tense verb in the indicative mood.
 - e. I suspect that Cornelius told his friends what the angel had said, and there were waiting with great expectation for the **message, by which they would saved.**

Vs 15 - Again, Peter is continuing to retell the story, he outlines how he began to speak.

Then Spirit fell on them, just as it had on us, at the beginning. He is of course referring to Pentecost and how the Spirit fell on the 12 or the 120 **as evidenced by speaking in tongues.**

Vs 16 - Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how he had told us: *‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’*

Peter rightly connects this as **proof** that Gentiles have been baptized by the Holy Spirit.

APPLICATION: Today, we teach that we are **baptized by the Holy Spirit**, when we are **saved** (Rom 8:9; ICor 12:13; Eph 1:13-14), but we **do not all speak in tongues** as part of that **salvation experience.**

In fact, I would estimate that the number of believers who speak in tongues as part of their **salvation experience** is low when compared against those who **do speak in tongues as part of their salvation experience.**

In a study of over 1,000 American Evangelicals conducted in 2022, 25% of those who self-identify as evangelicals report speaking in tongues at least once. The number who would report that it was part of their salvation experience would be even lower.

<https://www.christianpost.com/news/25-percent-us-evangelicals-say-they-have-spoken-in-tongues.html>

We see this same phenomenon in Acts. Of the many groups of people and individuals who will come to faith only four times are we told that speaking in tongues accompanied that event.

Interestingly enough: Once with the Jews, once with the Samaritans, once with the Gentiles, and once with John’s disciples who had not heard about Jesus or the Holy Spirit.

Vs 17 - Having seen undeniable proof that the Holy Spirit had been given to the Gentiles, having seen that the **exact same gift** (the gift is equal in all measurable ways) to that gift that had been given to Jewish believers at Pentecost, (to the 12 or the 120), **who was I that I could stand against God.**

You see his point, all prejudices had to hit the floor. It was clear that God had given the Gentiles His Holy Spirit, it could not be denied.

For me not to baptized them, would be for me to stand in God’s way!

Vs 18 - Then when those of the *circumcision party* heard all of these things, they fell silent. Of course they did, they too had to conclude that God had poured out His Spirit on Gentiles.

There is no other way to understand what has occurred.

Then they (those of the circumcision party) glorified God saying: *“Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.”*

In spite of all Jesus has said, in spite of all the Old Testament said about the nation of Israel and their role, in spite of all the prophecies, they are just now connecting the dots that God intends to save Gentiles the exact same way he has saved Jews, through faith in Jesus Christ.

The light just came on for many of the circumcision party!

This ends the story of the conversion of the first Gentiles and how the Jewish believers initially saw it, along with how they came to understand it, after Peter put in all in an orderly context.

19 Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. 20 But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. 21 And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. 22 The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. 23 When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, 24 for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. 25 So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, 26 and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.

Here in verse 19, the ministry of the Jewish believers picks up where Acts 8:4 left off:

“59 And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” 60 And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep. 8:1 ¶ And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. 2 Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. 3 But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison. 4 ¶ Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.” (Ac 7:59-8:4 ESV)

Those who were scattered, went about preaching the word. It is now time to pick that back up and provide additional details.

Vs 19 - Those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen, and their fleeing Jerusalem, traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch.

Phoenicia stretched along the coast, **Cyprus** was an island in the Mediterranean Sea, and **Antioch** was the third largest city in the Roman empire. It was a free city that had its own municipal government. It had a large Greek speaking majority and a small Jewish minority.

These that fled were speaking to no one except Jews.

Vs 20 - But there were some men of this group, men of Cyprus and Cyrene (Hellenistic Jews), who upon arriving in Antioch spoke to the Hellenist (Greeks).

These men from Cyprus and Cyrene were Greek speaking Jews and proselytes and they began to speak to the Greek Gentiles of the city of Antioch.

Peter had opened the door with Cornelius and his family, now we are about to see Gentiles begin to flood through the open door.

Men from Cyprus and Cyrene, came to Antioch and spoke to the Hellenists also and preached the Lord Jesus.

We can imagine that they preached on the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus and the need to place faith in Him to be saved. This message they preached not only to the Jews but also to the Greeks.

Vs 21 - The **hand of the Lord was with them** and a “**great number**” of Greek speaking Gentiles believed and turned to the Lord. A great number of **Hellenist place faith in Jesus Christ**.

Notice a great number **believed** and turned to the Lord. They believed in Jesus by faith, and they **turned** from their sins to Jesus.

Here, in this major Roman (pagan I might add) city a revival broke out and it is a Gentile revival, it involves the Greek speaking Gentiles.

So that I do not bury the lede and so you see it happen. Antioch will become the home church for Gentile missions. From Antioch, we will see three missionary journeys (headed by Paul) each proceeding deeper and deeper into the Roman empire.

As the church in Jerusalem was the center of the Messianic Jewish church, the church in Antioch will become the center of Gentile Christianity and the launching point of Gentile missions.

JUST A POINT: When the gospel came to Cornelius it came to a man who prayed, a man who in some ways was pursuing Yahweh. When the gospel came to Antioch, it came to an utterly pagan city!

Vs 22 - The church in Jerusalem, which would have been much smaller due to persecution that drove people out of Jerusalem (gets words about this Gentile revival).

They hear about a massive number of Greek Gentiles coming to faith, what started with Peter and the household of Cornelius has now blossomed into many Gentiles coming to faith in Jesus.

This report makes it to Jerusalem, and the church in Jerusalem, makes the decision to send Barnabas, seemingly to investigate, to check out what is happening in **Antioch**.

Vs 23 - Barnabas came to Antioch and saw the **grace of God**. We do not know what he observed, but what he observed convinced him, that that God was at work in Antioch among the Hellenist.

He verified and validated that what was happening in this massive pagan city was of God!

He saw the grace of God and **he was glad!** The Greek word means that he **rejoiced!**

APPLICATION: When visitors swing by the Truth Seekers class, I hope they see the grace of God. I hope the emphasis on everything we say is grace.

He saw that these Greeks had come to a **legitimate, living, and vibrant faith in Jesus**.

He **exhorted them to remain faithful** to the Lord Jesus with **steadfast purpose**. The verb tense of exhorted is imperfect, the picture is that he kept exhorting them, he kept encouraging them.

Vs 24 - Then we are told a few additional things about Saul to add to our understanding of this man:

- 1) **He is a good man**. The Greek word translated good is: **ἀγαθός (agathos)**. It means **excellent, honorable, free from guile, good**.

Tabitha was full of “**good**” works. We will be told in Acts 23 that Paul lived with a “**good**” conscience before God.

- 2) **He is full of the Holy Spirit**. The Greek word is **πλήρης (pleres)**. When the church picked the first deacons in (**Acts 6:5**), they looked for men who were full of the Holy Ghost and full of wisdom. In (**Acts 7:55**), as Stephen was being martyred, we are told that he was a man “**full of the Holy Spirit**.”

3) **He is full of faith.** Stephen was described (Acts 6:5 and 6:8) as a man who was **full of faith**,

By the way it appears while Barnabas was in Antioch, a “**great number**” of people were added to the Lord. So, it appears, Barnabas did more than simply **gave his stamp of approval**, he **joined them in the work**.

BY THE WAY... This is another **progress report** to Theophilus, and no doubt he had to be amazed at the growth and expansion of the gospel!

Vs 25 - Barnabas is watching all these Greeks come to faith in Jesus Christ, we can expect that **he is amazed**, but it appears he is also **concerned**, and possibly **overwhelmed**.

Who will teach these **new believers**, who will **disciple these new believers**, they are so far from Jerusalem where the apostles are located.

Barnabas makes a decision to go get Saul who had been slipped off to Tarsus, when the Hellenist attempted to kill him in Jerusalem.

Why did he decide to get Paul? We do not know, I suspect we can come up with a few possible reasons, but Barnabas leaves Antioch and proceeds to Tarsus to “**look for**” Saul.

The idea of the Greek is to **hunt for**, to **search for**, to **seek up and down for**.

Vs 26 - Barnabas arrived in Tarsus, we can imagine that it took some time to find Saul, but **ultimately Barnabas found him**, and brought Saul to Antioch.

Then for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the professing believers, they met with the church in Antioch. At these meetings they (Saul and Barnabas) taught a great many people.

It was in Antioch, under the teaching and leadership of Barnabas and Saul, **where believers were first called Christians**. The word literally means “**a partisan of Christ**” or “**belonging to the party of Christ**” or even “**a little Christ**.” It was likely coined as a derogatory term.

This will become a universal (and beloved term) for believers, probably used more than any other term, but it is only used three times in the New Testament (here; Ac 26:28; I Pet 4:15-16).

But it was in the Gentiles city of Antioch, where believers were first called Christians.

Here is what we have seen in the book of Acts:

- They had been called disciples (Acts 1:15).
- They had been called believers (Acts 5:14).
- They had been called witnesses (Acts 5:32).
- They had been called brothers (Acts 6:3).
- They had been called followers of the Way (Acts 9:2).
- They had been called saints (Acts 9:13).
- Now here in (Acts 11:26) they are called Christians.

27 Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius). 29 So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. 30 And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

Vs 27 - In these days, the yearlong period when Barnabas and Saul were teaching the believers in Antioch, during that period, prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch.

Here the word is used of those who could under the power of the Holy Spirit, **foretell the future**. Prophets were coming down (in elevation) from Jerusalem to Antioch.

Vs 28 - Luke then tells us about one of them, his name was **Agabus**.

This prophet Agabus is mentioned here and in Acts 21:10, so we will run into him again.

This prophet named Agabus came from Jerusalem and **foretold by the Spirit**, that there was coming a great famine over all the known (Roman) world.

Then Luke tells us that this famine took place during the days of Claudius. History tells us that Claudius reigned from 41 – 54AD and a famine was known to have happened in 46AD.

So as best we can tell it is likely around the start of this famine in 45-46AD.

The best date of Jesus' crucifixion, in my opinion, according to our calendar was Friday, April 3, 33AD. If you like it on the Jewish calendar, Friday, Nisan 14 of 33AD (immediately prior to the end of the day by Jewish reckoning).

Vs 29 - The disciples, the believers, the Christians in Antioch determined, each according to their own ability (some much, some little, based on their own unique circumstances) to send relief to the brothers in Judea.

As the church in Jerusalem had sent assistance in the form of Barnabas to the Gentile church in Antioch. The Gentile church in Antioch now sends financial assistance to the Jewish church in Jerusalem.

Vs 30 - But more than thinking about it, praying about it, deciding to do it, they actually **did it**. They sent it to the “**elders**” by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

This is the Greek word translated elder is **πρεσβύτερος (presbuteros)** and this is the first use of this **word associated with the church**. We have seen it used multiple times to refer to Jewish elders, here is the first time we see it refer to Christian elders.

It seems that this term is being used to describe **teaching pastors** or **leaders** who meet the pastoral qualifications. It does not seem to be referring to the apostles.

Acts, the book of transitions and now approximately 12 years after the death of the Messiah, we see the emergence of elders who begin to replace the apostles, although not with their same authority. In (Acts 14:21-23 and 15:1-4) we read about them.

As we end out time today with the amazing story of what happened in Antioch, and how this group of believers thrived and grew under the teaching of Saul and Barnabas.

J.M. Boice in his commentary wrote: “As far as I know, this is the first charitable act of this nature in all recorded history – one race of people collecting money to help another people. No wonder they were first called Christians at Antioch.”

Remember what the Lord said in Acts 1:4-8, although it has been roughly 13 years since the Lord uttered those words, the church which was originally Jewish spread from Jerusalem into Judea and tens of thousands were saved. It then spread to Samaria where many more were saved, and now it has gone into the Gentile world, where it will spread like wildfire to the remotest parts of the world.