

ACTS 11

Vs. 1-3 – Most Jews did not believe Gentiles could be saved. Another group believed Gentiles could be saved but only if they first became a Jew, got circumcised, and then learned and followed all Jewish laws and traditions (that is who *those of the circumcision* represented). Both views are incorrect because of **John 3:16-17** clearly states (read **John 3:16-17**). The phrase “*contended with him*” – refers to the fact these were not pleasant conversations; they were intense quarrels/arguments. When it says and “*ate with them*” in that culture that was huge. Sharing a meal together was a special sign of fellowship hence, this was considered to be a significant compromise by these Jewish Christians. 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” (**Acts 3:19**). 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.”

Vs. 4-18 – God provided a general promise in **Genesis 12:3** that through Abraham the word of God would be spread to all nations. God was even

more specific when He spoke through Malachi in **Malachi 1:11** regarding the Gentiles would be His people too when it says, *“For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; in every place incense shall be offered to My name, and a pure offering; for My name shall be great among the nations,” says the Lord of hosts.*” Even though the Jews had the O.T., many of them only accepted the Pentateuch (*the first 5 books of the O.T.*). It was hard for some Jews (*because of pride*) to accept “all of the Bible” and not just the parts that fit their narrative and agenda (*just like it is for many modern-day Christians*). Notice Peter did not flaunt his apostolic authority; he did not say you should believe just because I am an apostle. Instead, he began with a humble recitation of what happened. Peter shared from the beginning what happened to him as to why he has had a change of heart toward Gentiles and the fact Gentiles were coming to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Peter had 6 witnesses who could affirm what he said with him as stated in **vs. 12**. And when Peter states in **vs. 12** *“We entered the man’s house”* This may have surprised Peter’s questioners, because it seemed like an admission of guilt – Peter admitted entering the home of a Gentile, something prohibited by Jewish custom and tradition (though not by the Law of Moses.). Yet Peter was careful to add that before he ever entered the man’s house, an angel had been standing in his house; so if it

was permissible for an angel to enter the Gentiles house; it was permissible for Peter to enter. The 6 witnesses were transformed by the Gospel and they received the promised Holy Spirit. Look at what Peter says in **vs. 16**. How do you know Jesus is real...how do you know you are saved? *“Your life has been transformed after you confessed with your mouth the Lord Jesus and you believe in your heart God raised Jesus from the dead (read **1 John 5:13**).* And in **vs. 17** when it says, *“If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?”* So since God was reaching out to the Gentiles, who was Peter that he could withstand God? Peter recognized the importance of sensing where God is going and then he should head in that same direction, instead of trying to persuade God to go in his direction. **Vs. 18** highlights the hearts of the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem were soft enough to be guided and corrected by God. It is a glorious thing when God’s people will allow their prejudices and traditions to be overcome by God’s Word and God’s work. Initially the Jewish people were upset with Peter for eating with them but after they heard the whole story, they ended up rejoicing in **vs. 18**. Peter’s recitation of the facts in **vs. 4-18** is a great example for the church today, we have to hear a person out before we even attempt to pass judgment or make up our minds about a thing.

Vs. 19-21 – When the church accepted Peter’s testimony that the Good News was also for the Gentiles, Christianity exploded in Gentile areas. What if the prostitutes, drug addicts, homosexual community, and people in prison were to accept the fact that the Gospel is for them too; that the Gospel can radically change them too (but it will take saved people taking the Gospel to them). The seeds of this missionary work had been sown after Stephen’s death so when the believing Jews were persecuted and scattered, they just had to water the Gospel that had already been planted. The explosion occurred because it was shared and because the seed of the Gospel had already been planted. So we should not get discouraged when the invitation to discipleship is given if no one accepts on that particular Sunday (especially, if you are not praying for the message and the messenger and you are not sharing and inviting people to come to the church). In **vs. 19** note the phrase “*Preaching the word to no one but the Jews only*” - at first, Christians scattered over the Roman Empire preached only to Jews. But they eventually began to preach Jesus Christ to the Gentiles as well. The church is not a “country club for members only.” The church is a hospital for spiritually sick people who know they need Jesus.

And it was in Antioch, that we have the first example of Christians deliberately targeting Gentiles for evangelism, and this effort had great results (a great number believed and turned to the Lord). Antioch was third greatest

city in the Roman Empire, behind Rome and Alexandria. Antioch was known for its business and commerce, for its sophistication and culture, but also for its immorality. Theologians would say, Jerusalem was all about religion; Rome was all about power; Alexandria was all about intellect, Athens was all about philosophy; and Antioch was all about business and immorality. In **vs. 21** notice the critically important phrase, “*And the hand of the Lord was with them*” - because God was with them, their ministry was blessed and multiplied, the result was that a great number believed and turned to the Lord. A ministry can't turn people to the Lord unless the hand of the Lord is with them.

Vs. 22-24 – Regarding the phrase “*they sent out Barnabas*” - the church in Jerusalem sent an able man in Barnabas, previously known for his generosity (**Acts 4:36-37**) and his warm acceptance of Saul of Tarsus after he was converted (**Acts 9:26-28**). News was always getting back to Jerusalem, whenever possible we should share the good and mighty things God is doing. Social media is great for sharing news about us personally, but how more impactful it can be for the kingdom of God if we shared more things that edify the church and glorify God. Regarding the phrase, “*when he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad*” - at the church in Antioch, when Barnabas had seen the grace of God, he was glad. There was something in the work and

atmosphere among the followers of Jesus in Antioch that made Barnabas able to see the grace of God. In whatever gathering of Christians we associate ourselves with, it is important that others be able to see the grace of God among us. They should not see an emphasis on self, on man-made rules, on human performance – but on the glorious grace of God. It will make them glad. Regarding the phrase *“encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord”* - Barnabas rightly focused on his main job as a leader of the congregation. He strengthened the church family itself, with the result that a great many people were added to the Lord. This is the plan for church growth spoken of in **Ephesians 4:11-16**. Leaders in the church dedicate themselves to building strong, healthy Christians. As the saints are equipped for the work of the ministry, they grow into maturity, and do their ministry, and it causes growth of the body. But you have to avail yourself to the teaching, training...avail yourself to pray especially corporately for God’s favor be upon that ministry.

Vs. 25-26 – Saul had been sent to his home in Tarsus for his protection after his conversion caused such an uproar among the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. But Barnabas remembered his precious brother Saul, and now he went and found him. And he did not have a 108 Purple Street address in his address book to go find Paul...notice the phrase *“to seek”* literally means to *“hunt for*

one.” Barnabas had to do some laborious searching to find Paul. Paul was so valuable to Barnabas that it was worth it for him to leave the work in Antioch for a season and search hard to find Paul. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. Together, Barnabas and Paul taught a great many people, making the church in Antioch strong. Paul had spent twelve years in Tarsus since we last met him in Acts 9; but those years were not wasted or lost, but spent in quiet ministry and preparation for future service. *Before God uses you publicly; He privately tutors you.* The followers of Christ had been called *disciples* (Acts 1:15) - *saints* (Acts 9:13) - *believers* (Acts 5:14) - *brothers* (Acts 6:3) - *witnesses* (Acts 5:32) - *followers of the Way* (Acts 9:2) - *Nazarenes* (Acts 24:5) - *Now they would be called Christians.* At Antioch we first discover the word “Christian” a name given to those who acted so much like Christ that their enemy gave the followers of Christ the name Christian at Antioch. Antioch “had some of the greatest preachers including Barnabas, Paul, and Peter; and Theophilus (for whom Luke writes about in his dedication to the book of Luke). Christianity is not just a religion; more importantly, Christianity is about a relationship with God through a confession of faith in Christ Jesus.

Vs. 27-30 – Food distribution has always been a Biblical concept and a need ministry the church must continue to engage in. In **vs. 28** we don’t know

exactly how Agabus showed by the Spirit this famine was on the way. But the Christians took the word seriously, and generously prepared to meet the coming need. There were significant food shortages due to droughts so this statement by Agabus was really easy to believe. Look at the hearts of believers during drought and/or hard times; they were not hoarding goods like we saw (and continue to see during this pandemic and the current baby formula crisis). You can tell these were disciples and Christians, because they gave generously to meet the need. They gave according to the ability of their resources; those who had more gave more, probably referencing a proportional giving. It also means that they gave according to the ability of their faith, trusting that their gift to God's work was a worthy investment in His kingdom, and not a loss. We also see they determined to give. If a person does not determine to give, they often never do (read **1 Corinthians 16:2**). If everybody in the church gave like you give; what do you think would happen to the current giving pattern of our church? Notice the phrase "*sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul*" - The high regard that Barnabas and Saul had among all was evident by the fact that they were trusted with the relief fund. This may have been the first charitable act of this nature recorded in New Testament history – one race of people collecting money to help another race of people. No wonder they were first called Christians at

Antioch.” Was it a humbling experience for the Jewish believers to need and receive help from the Gentiles? Most likely, but it was also a beautiful demonstration of love and a wonderful testimony of unity.