

# ACTS

## Chapter 11

The apostles and the brothers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God.<sup>2</sup> So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him<sup>3</sup> and said, “You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.”<sup>4</sup> Peter began and explained everything to them precisely as it had happened:<sup>5</sup> “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.<sup>6</sup> I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, reptiles, and birds of the air.<sup>7</sup> Then I heard a voice telling me, ‘Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.’<sup>8</sup> I replied, ‘Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’<sup>9</sup> “The voice spoke from heaven a second time, ‘Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.’<sup>10</sup> This happened three times, and then it was all pulled up to heaven again.<sup>11</sup> “Right then three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea stopped at the house where I was staying.<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup> He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, ‘Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter.<sup>14</sup> He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.’<sup>15</sup> “As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning.<sup>16</sup> Then I remembered what the Lord had said: ‘John baptized with<sup>a</sup> water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’<sup>17</sup> So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?”<sup>18</sup> When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, “So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life.”

**11:1** *The apostles and the brothers.* At times “brothers” is used to refer to those of common Jewish lineage (2:29; 7:2), but in Christian contexts it denotes those united in Christ (6:3; 10:23). In matters of deep concern, the apostles did not act alone. The divine will gave guidance, and the apostles interpreted and exhorted, but the consent of the whole church was sought (“the whole group,” 6:5; “apostles and the brothers,” 11:1; “the church,” 11:22; “the church and the apostles and elders,” 15:4; cf. 15:22).

HEARD – Word of what had happened in Caesarea spread through the church like a wildfire fanned by a strong wind. And this is understandable, for what just happened was in every sense of the word revolutionary. To bring non-Jews, Gentiles, into a full and equal relationship with Jews – entering their homes and eating their food at their tables – as Peter had done, was astounding. It left the church reeling from the suddenness with which this development had burst upon them. Up until now all the believers, even those in Samaria, were native Jews or those who upon accepting the Jewish faith, had submitted to all the ceremonial requirements, including circumcision. (LL)

**11:2** *circumcised believers*. Jewish Christians. – The ones who appear to be the most upset were those who insisted that circumcision and other Jewish laws were absolutely essential for membership in the Christian church. We might call them the circumcision party. They appeared on the scene again in Antioch some time later and created a problem among Paul and Peter and Barnabas (Gal. 2:11-13). (LL)

**11:3** *uncircumcised men*. The Gentiles who would not observe the laws of clean and unclean food and would violate Jewish regulations concerning food preparation.

**11:4–17** See notes on 10:1–23, 28–33.

**11:4** EXPLAINED – Peter didn't reprimand his accusers, not did he argue with them. He remembered His own attitude in this whole matter not more than four or five weeks earlier. Beautifully and carefully he led his hearer through the same schooling he had received from the Lord. (LL)

**11:14** *you and all your household*. † Not only the family, including any children, but also slaves and employed individuals under Cornelius's authority (see note on Ge 6:18).

**11:17** *oppose God*. Peter could not deny the Gentiles the invitation to be baptized (10:47) and to enjoy full fellowship in Christ with all believers. The Jewish believers were compelled to recognize that God was going to save Gentiles on equal terms with Jews. By divine action rather than by human choice, the door was being opened to Gentiles.

**11:18** *repentance unto life*. † A change of one's attitude, which leads to a turning from sin to God and results in eternal life (see note on 2:38). – It means that a mission by Jews to Gentiles can begin because, as Peter has seen, God has removed the social barrier between Jews and Gentiles. It is a breakthrough not simply because Peter and the Jerusalem church now accept Gentiles for baptism but also because they recognize the right of Jewish Christians to freely associate with Gentiles in the course of their mission. (Tannehill)

**<sup>19</sup> Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews.**

**<sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord. <sup>22</sup> News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. <sup>23</sup> When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. <sup>24</sup> He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord. <sup>25</sup> Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, <sup>26</sup> 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. <sup>27</sup> During this time some prophets**

came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. <sup>28</sup> 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.) <sup>29</sup> The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea. <sup>30</sup> This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

**11:19** *Phoenicia*. A country about 15 miles wide and 120 miles long stretching along the northeastern Mediterranean coast (modern Lebanon). Its important cities were Tyre and Sidon.

*Cyprus*. An island in the northeastern Mediterranean; the home of Barnabas (4:36).

*Antioch*. The third city of the Roman empire (after Rome and Alexandria). It was 15 miles inland from the northeast corner of the Mediterranean. The first largely Gentile local church was located here, and it was from this church that Paul's three missionary journeys were launched (13:1–4; 15:40; 18:23). – Had about one-half million in population. (PBC) – It is important to note that the arrival of the Gospel in Antioch is the result of the scattering of Christians following Stephen's death, not the result of a mission organized by the Jerusalem church. (Tannehill) – 240 miles north of Jerusalem. (LL)

TELLING THE MESSAGE – What a much needed lesson for Christians today! Everywhere these early untrained Christians went they talked about the message of God's love in Christ. No one told them this was their responsibility. It was simply a matter of "We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard!" (3:20). (LL)

**11:20** *Cyrene*. See note on 2:10. *Greeks*. Not Greek-speaking Jews, but Gentiles.

TELLING THE GOOD NEWS – Now Luke turns at once to the mission of the Hellenists in Antioch. By so doing he shows that the expansion of the people to include Gentiles is not the work only of one person but is part of a larger enterprise. (Sacra)

**11:21** *Lord's hand*. Cf. 4:30; 13:11; cf. also Lk 1:66. It indicates divine approval and blessing, sometimes evidenced by signs and wonders (see Ex 8:19). – Growth in the church, however large or small, is strictly and solely by the grace of God and the work of the Holy Spirit through the spoken and written Word. (LL)

**11:22** *Barnabas*. See notes on 4:36; 9:27. – Anxious that these new Gentile believers know that they were fully accepted into the one Christian church, the congregation decided to send their greetings and blessings to these new believers in Antioch. Barnabas was not only a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, but he had another qualification that made him just the right person for the job – he was a native-born Cyrian, just as some of those who had taken the Gospel to Antioch. All of this, of course, was neatly set in motion by God. (LL)

*Antioch*. See note on v. 19. The sending of Barnabas was apparently in keeping with the Jerusalem church's policy of sending leaders to check on new ministries that came to their attention (see 8:14).

**11:24** *full of the Holy Spirit and faith*. See the description of Stephen (6:5).

**11:25** *Tarsus*. See 9:11, 30 and note on 22:3.

**11:26** *whole year*. Luke notes definite periods of time (18:11; 19:8, 10; 24:27; 28:30).

*Christians*. Whether adopted by believers or invented by enemies as a term of reproach, it is an apt title for those “belonging to Christ” (the meaning of the term).

**11:27** *prophets*. The first mention of the gift of prophecy in Acts. Prophets preach, exhort, explain or, as in this case, foretell (see 13:1; 15:32; 19:6; 21:9–10; Ro 12:6; 1Co 12:10; 13:2, 8; 14:3, 6, 29–37; see also notes on Jnh 3:2; Zec 1:1; Eph 4:11).

**1:28** *Agabus*. Later foretells Paul’s imprisonment (21:10). In Acts, prophets are engaged in foretelling (v. 27; 21:9–10) at least as often as in “forthtelling” (15:32).

**11:30** *elders*. † First reference to them in Acts (see notes on 1Ti 3:1; 5:17). Since the apostles are not mentioned, they may have been absent from Jerusalem at this time, or the elders may have had charge of mundane matters, freeing the apostles’ time for “the ministry of the word of God” (6:2).