

## Acts 11

### **Salvation of the Gentiles Explained in Jerusalem**

After the experience at Cornelius' house in Caesarea, the word spread to Judea and all of the believers there and they were critical of Peter for eating in the house with uncircumcised men. Peter goes and addresses the leadership of the Jerusalem church and tells the story of what God did in the house of this Gentile. He describes his vision of the sheet and then concludes with fact that the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as he did upon them in Jerusalem. Peter concludes with the statement in verse 17, "... who was I to think that I could stand in God's way?" This is the same advice that Gamaliel had given to the council when they were ready to kill the Apostles. Sometimes what God is doing doesn't line up with our plans and our preconceived ideas. The wise believer will observe and discern what God is doing and then not stand in the way to defend tradition. When the people heard this they praised God and rejoiced that even the Gentiles have been granted repentance that leads to life.

### The Church in Antioch (11:19)

This short passage is one of the key passages in the book. The persecution had spread the believers out from Jerusalem to extend as far as Antioch in Syria, Cyprus, and Cyrene. As the Apostles were poised on the Mediterranean Sea, The Holy Spirit has already compelled believers to spread out to the Jewish communities along the Eastern Mediterranean basin in North Africa, Syria, and Cyprus. At first the believers were only speaking to Jews about the Gospel, but in Antioch some men from Cyprus and Cyrene begin to share the good news to Greeks as well. Luke tells us that the Lord's hand was upon them and there was a great response. When Jerusalem hears what is going on, they choose Barnabas to go and check out the situation. Why Barnabas? He was an honorable and faithful disciple, had gifts of encouragement and he was a Cypriot so he would have a cultural connection with those who were working in Antioch. When Barnabas sees what is going on in the new model of ministry in Antioch, he goes the short distance to Tarsus and gets Saul, who had been sent home to wait for the right time. Saul and Barnabas work together to bring Theological depth and stability as well as credibility to this church. Luke tells us that it is here that the word "Christian" is first used. Why? Well, because up until this point, the movement was really a sect of Judaism and they were united by blood and culture. But now in Antioch, they are a mixture of Jews and Greeks. What holds them together into one community? The answer is Christ! He is the common denominator and so the movement take the name of the one who is held in common to make us one people – Christ – Christians.

We will now see a shift from Jerusalem as the center of the Church to the Greek world. First Antioch in Syria, then it will move to Ephesus in Asia, then on to Rome. The

church is changing – it is becoming multicultural, and less Jewish. New leadership is rising that is less Jerusalem based and more Greek based. Up until this point growth has been spontaneous and driven by the Holy Spirit. By chapter 13 we will have the first intentional missionary efforts to extend the Gospel. Mission strategy will be born out of the experiment of Antioch under the leadership of Saul and Barnabas.

The chapter concludes with the mention of a major famine that greatly affects Jerusalem and the church there. An offering is collected in Antioch and sent to the Jerusalem church by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.