

Acts 11**Lesson 11
Peter's Defense and the Church at Antioch****Outline****I. Peter's Defense about Cornelius (vv. 1-18)**

- A. *Peter questioned by the Jews for going to Gentiles (vv. 1-3)*
- B. *Peter's explanation (vv. 4-17)*
 - 1. I was sent by the Lord (vv. 4-12)
 - a. I learned in a vision not to call what God has cleansed common (vv. 4-10)
 - b. Spirit directed me to go with the messengers of Cornelius (vv. 11-12)
 - 2. Cornelius told us that an angel said to send for me (Peter) to hear words by which he could be saved (vv. 13-14)
 - 3. The Holy Spirit fell on Cornelius and his house (vv. 15-17)
 - a. As I began to speak (v. 15)
 - b. Reminded of the promise of Holy Spirit baptism (v. 16)
 - c. If God gave them the same gift, how could I withstand God? (v. 17)
- C. *The conclusion of the Jews: God has allowed the Gentiles to be saved (v. 18)*

II. The Church at Antioch (vv. 19-30)

- A. *The gospel preached at Antioch (vv. 19-21)*
 - 1. Because of the scattering (vv. 19-20)
 - 2. Great number obeyed (v. 21)
- B. *Barnabas was sent to Antioch (vv. 22-24a)*
 - 1. Sent by the church at Jerusalem (v. 22)
 - 2. Encouraged them to continue with the Lord (v. 23)
 - 3. Barnabas was a good man (v. 24a)
- C. *The church at Antioch grew (v. 24b)*
- D. *Barnabas brought Saul to Antioch (vv. 25-26a)*
 - 1. Assembled with the church for a year (v. 25)
 - 2. Taught many (v. 26a)
- E. *First place disciples were called Christians (v. 26b)*
- F. *Church at Antioch sent relief to Judea (vv. 27-30)*

Key Verses that Summarize the Chapter**Acts 11:18, 26**

*18 When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, "Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life."
26 And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.*

This chapter gives us more information about the conversion of the first Gentiles that was seen in the last chapter. Questions about what Peter had done are raised by the Jewish brethren in Jerusalem (vv. 1-3). Thus, Peter defends his actions (vv. 4-17). From the evidence presented, the Jewish brethren conclude that the Gentiles can be saved (v. 18). Then we will see the gospel come to Antioch (vv. 19-30).

Peter's Defense about Cornelius (vv. 1-18)

Peter questioned by the Jews for going to the Gentiles (vv. 1-3). Word about what happened with Cornelius quickly reached the church in Jerusalem. When Peter went to Jerusalem the brethren contended with him (v. 2).¹ They questioned him about associating with Gentiles and eating with them, not to mention going so far as to baptize them and accept them into fellowship (v. 3). This was alarming to these Jewish Christians. They were going through the same struggle Peter did earlier (Acts 10:14, 28-29).

"It seems implied that some of the apostles who were still at Jerusalem were in on the criticism. At least, had they expressed their approval of Peter's action, there would have been less opposition from those circumcised believers making their complaint."² They were struggling too because this was new to them and they had not seen the evidence Peter had.

Peter's explanation (vv. 4-17). Peter told what happened "in order from the beginning" (v. 4).³ Peter then related the three miracles that surrounded the story of Cornelius.

1. **Peter said he was sent by the Lord in a vision** (vv. 5-12). As Peter was in Joppa he was praying, went into a trance and saw a vision of a great sheet let down from heaven with all manner of beasts (vv. 5-6). Peter heard a voice say, "Rise, Peter, kill and eat" (v. 7). Peter responded by saying he wouldn't since he had never eaten anything common or unclean (v. 8). God responded saying, "What God has cleansed you must not call common" (v. 9). The obvious application was that the Gentiles were no longer considered common or unclean (cf. Acts 10:28-29).

When three men came from Cornelius, the Spirit instructed Peter to go with them (vv. 10-12). He was told to go "doubting nothing" (v. 12).⁴ Peter took six brethren and went to Cornelius.

2. **Cornelius told Peter and his companions that an angel said to send for Peter** (13-14). An angel appeared to Cornelius and told him to send for Peter (v. 13). In the previous chapter he was told that Peter would tell him what he must do (Acts 10:6). Here we learn that Peter would tell him words by which he would be saved (v. 14).

1 "So Peter is at once put on the defensive as the contention went on. It is plain that Peter was not regarded as any kind of pope or overlord" (A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1997 by BibleSoft & Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament. Copyright (c) 1985 by Broadman Press).

2 Gareth L. Reese, *Acts*, 407.

3 NASB translates this, "orderly sequence." Acts 10 was not intended to be an orderly record of the events, however this chapter is. The difference the order makes will be seen at verse 15 concerning when the Holy Spirit came upon Cornelius and his household.

4 "The verb translated 'without misgivings' is the same verb translated 'took issue' in verse 2. Peter, guided by the Holy Spirit, raised no such opposition as the Jewish brethren were raising" (Gareth L. Reese, *Acts*, 410).

3. **The Holy Spirit fell on the house of Cornelius** (vv. 15-17).⁵ Peter said the Spirit fell as he *began* to speak (v. 15). When this happened, Peter was reminded of the promise the Lord made of the Holy Spirit baptism (v. 16; Acts 1:5). Peter concluded that if they received the same gift that the apostles had (Acts 2), he could not withstand God (v. 17).⁶ To resist the conclusion that the Gentiles could be saved like the Jews would be to oppose the will of God and thus oppose God himself. To refuse to go to the Gentiles would be withstanding God.

The conclusion of the Jews: God has allowed the Gentiles to be saved (v. 18). When the Jewish brethren heard Peter's defense, they did two things. (1) They became silent. They ceased taking issue or contending (cf. v. 2). (2) They glorified God saying that God has granted repentance unto life to the Gentiles. They embraced what Peter had done and spoke in favor of it, having concluded that the Gentiles are now gospel subjects.

The Church at Antioch (vv. 19-30)

The gospel preached at Antioch (vv. 19-21). When the disciples were scattered because of persecution (that arose over the situation with Stephen), some of them went to Phoenicia, Cyprus and to Antioch preaching the gospel to Jews only. But some from Cyprus and Cyrene came to Antioch and preached to the Hellenist, that is Gentiles (v. 20).⁷ When they heard the preaching, a great number believed and turned to the Lord (v. 21). Here is another progress report.

Barnabas was sent to Antioch (vv. 22-24a). When the brethren at Jerusalem heard about what happened at Antioch, they sent Barnabas to the church at Antioch (v. 22). When he arrived he saw the effects of the grace of God (v. 23). He saw that they had received the grace of God. Barnabas encouraged them to continue with the Lord (to be loyal to the Lord or "cleave" to the Lord, KJV). What was needed to accomplish that was "purpose of heart" (a resolute heart, a determination to remain faithful).

The church at Antioch grew (v. 24b). Due to the work that Barnabas did many turned to the Lord. The church at Antioch was growing (another progress report).

Barnabas brought Saul to Antioch (vv. 25-26a). Barnabas went to Tarsus, found Saul and brought him to Antioch. The two of them assembled with the church for a year and taught many people.

5 See lesson 10 for more explanation of what measure of the Spirit Cornelius received.

6 The ESV and NASB translate this "stand in God's way."

7 "The express object of the narrative has been to describe the admission of Gentiles into the church. There would have been nothing remarkable in these men preaching to Hellenists who had long before been received into the church, and formed a large part of the church at Jerusalem. It is better to follow the rendering of the King James Version and English Revised Version (1885), though the other reading has the stronger MS. evidence. Note, also, the contrast with the statement in Acts 11:19, 'to the Jews only.' There is no contrast between Jews and Hellenists, since Hellenists are included in the general term 'Jews' (M. R. Vincent, *Vincent's Word Studies of the New Testament*, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1997 by BibleSoft).

First place disciples were called Christians (v. 26b). It is here where the term Christian was first used.⁸ Some think the term was given in derision by the enemies of the cross. The term “called” means it was by divine calling. The same term is used in Matthew 2:12, 22 of a divine warning.⁹

This context shows that those in the church and those who are Christians are one and the same. Consider that those who believed and turned to the Lord (v. 21) were the ones who made up the church (v. 26). Those same people were called disciples (v. 26). They were also called Christians (v. 26).

Church at Antioch sent relief to Judea (vv. 27-30). Prophets¹⁰ came from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them, named Agabus, foretold of a great famine throughout the world (v. 28).¹¹ The famine happened during the time of Claudius Caesar.¹²

The brethren in Antioch determined to send relief to their brethren in Judea. Each gave according to his ability (v. 29).¹³ When the money was pooled together, they sent it¹⁴ to the elders¹⁵ using Barnabas and Saul as messengers (v. 30).

Questions

1. Who questioned Peter about his actions with Cornelius? _____

2. What was the contention that those in Jerusalem had with Peter? _____

3. What is the significance or importance of giving the story by order (v. 4)? _____

8 The term Christian is only used three times in the NT. The other two are Acts 26:28 and 1 Peter 4:16.

9 The same word is also used in Romans 7:3 were the woman would be “called” an adulteress. God calls her that.

10 These are New Testament prophets who were inspired by the Spirit (cf. v. 28).

11 The world likely refers to the Roman empire.

12 Claudius Caesar reigned from 41 AD to 54 AD.

13 They gave as they were prospered (cf. 1 Cor. 16:1-2).

14 The reference to sending “it” suggests collective action.

15 This is the first reference to elders in the church.

4. What three points did Peter make in his explanation? _____

5. What was Peter's conclusion (v. 17)? _____

6. What was the conclusion drawn by those who heard Peter (v. 18)? _____

7. What does it mean to withstand God? _____

8. How did the church at Antioch get started? _____

9. What are some first things found in this chapter? _____

10. What do we learn from seeing that those who are Christians and those in the church are the same? _____

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