



Book of Acts

Chapter 11

*Peter defends his ministry;
Gospel goes to Antioch*

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Theme: Peter defends his ministry; gospel goes to Antioch

The real ministry to the Gentiles emerges out of Antioch.
First 1-18 verse are a recap of Chapter 10.

McGee: Introduction: Peter recounts the events in connection with the conversion of Gentiles in the home of Cornelius. The news that the Gentiles had received the Word of God did not seem to bring any joy to the church in Jerusalem. They demand of Peter an explanation of his conduct, so Peter must defend his ministry—which is really difficult for Simon Peter, as he himself feels apologetic about it.

Antioch becomes the center of the gentile church.¹

The Gentile challenge

The conversion of Cornelius is a milestone in the church's history. However, it doesn't settle the troubling issues of the proper relationship of Jews to Gentiles within the body of believers. In fact, the church throughout Judea is soon buzzing with the tale that Peter met with and baptized Cornelius. Luke writes of the controversy: "The apostles and brothers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. So that when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him and said, 'You went into the house of uncircumcised man and ate with them'" (11:2-3).

Luke makes a distinction between "the apostles and brothers" (11:1) who hear about what Peter did and "the circumcised believers" who criticize them. This implies that the apostles and leaders of the Jerusalem church, as well as some believers in Judea, don't have a problem with Peter's actions in Caesarea. It is other circumcised believers of Jerusalem who think that Peter violated Judaistic regulations pertaining to the separation of Jews from Gentiles. (That is not to suggest that there is a formal "circumcision party" in the church at this time, though apparently there will be one later.)

The circumcised believers apparently do not criticize Peter for baptizing Cornelius. Rather, Peter is challenged because he enters the house where uncircumcised people are, and eats with them. (That he eats there is not directly stated by Luke but is inferred from Peter staying at Cornelius' home for some days.) "The sting in the charge, of course, is found in the ancient symbolism of table-fellowship: to eat with someone is to share spiritually with them as well; by implication to eat with Gentiles is to collude in idolatry" (Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, page 197).

Peter's opponents are accusing him of abandoning his sacred Jewish heritage by associating with and eating with uncircumcised Gentiles. Some think he is putting the identity of the church community at risk. Thinking in terms of the Jewish paradigm of Israel as God's holy nation, some emphasize that the church is a holy people. It is to be separate from the pollution of the world, including fraternizing with Gentiles. But now the church is tainted because one of its leaders violated ritual separation.

There may be another, more practical concern as well. The Hellenistic believers were persecuted and driven out of Jerusalem for their attacks on the foundations of Judaistic piety. Now Peter, a leading apostle, has disregarded the sacred and traditional laws of

¹McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:559). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

separation in order to associate with a Gentile. This may lead the Sanhedrin to persecute the remaining, and more conservative, Jewish converts in Jerusalem.²

Acts 11:1

And the apostles and brethren that were in Judaea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God.

Jewish Christians in Judea heard that the Gentiles at Caesarea, Samaria had received the gospel, so when Peter returned to Jerusalem he was rebuked for going among Gentiles with the gospel (Acts 11:1-3). This is another proof that Peter had no supremacy over the church as the prince of the apostles, as the vicar of Jesus Christ, and as the infallible head of the church. This is refuted in many New Testament scriptures. See 1 Peter 5:1.³

Five things that Peter claimed to be: (Dake)

1. A servant of Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:1)
2. An apostle of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:1)
3. A fellow elder (1 Peter 5:1)
4. A witness of the sufferings of Christ (1 Peter 5:1; Acts 5:32)
5. A partaker of the glory (1 Peter 5:1)

Barnes: And the apostles and brethren. The Christians who were in Judea. *Heard*, etc. So extraordinary an occurrence as that at Caesarea, the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Gentiles, and their reception into the church, would excite attention, and be likely to produce much sensibility in regard to the conduct of Peter and those with him. It was so contrary to all the ideas of the Jews, that it is not to be wondered at that it led to contention.⁴

LAN: A Gentile was anyone who was not a Jew; the Jewish believers are sometimes referred to as “the circumcised believers” (Acts 11:2). Most Jewish believers thought that God offered salvation only to the Jews because God had given his law to them (Exodus 19-20). A group in Jerusalem believed that Gentiles could be saved, but only if they followed all the Jewish laws and traditions—in essence, if they became Jews. Both were mistaken. God chose the Jews and taught them his laws so they could bring the message of salvation to *all* people (see Genesis 12:3; Psalm 22:27; Isaiah 42:4; Isaiah 49:6; Isaiah 56:3-7; Isaiah 60:1-3; Jeremiah 16:19-21; Zech. 2:11; Malachi 1:11; Romans 15:9-12).⁵

in Judea—rather, “throughout Judea.”

² <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts11.htm>

³ Dake Study Notes, Dake’s Study Bible

⁴ Barnes’ Notes on the New Testament

⁵ Life Application Notes

ESV: 1–18 Peter's Testimony in Jerusalem. The final scene of the Cornelius narrative takes place in Jerusalem, where some of Peter's fellow Jewish Christians questioned his acceptance of the Gentiles. Peter defended his action by retelling the events of the Gentile conversions with an emphasis on God's leading. This is basically a summary of ch. 10, with only a few added details.

Acts 11:2

And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him,

Clarke: Contended with him—A manifest proof this that the primitive Church at Jerusalem (and no Church can ever deserve this name but the Jerusalem Church) had no conception of St. Peter's supremacy, or of his being prince of the apostles. He is now called to account for his conduct, which they judged to be reprehensible; and which they would not have attempted to do had they believed him to be Christ's vicar upon earth, and the infallible Head of the Church. But this absurd dream is every where refuted in the New Testament.⁶

Barnes: They that were of the circumcision. The Christians who had been converted from among the Jews.

Contended with him. Disputed, or reproved him; charged him with being in fault. This is one of the circumstances which show conclusively that the apostles and early Christians did not regard Peter as having any particular *supremacy* over the church, or as being in any peculiar sense the vicar of Christ upon earth. If Peter had been regarded as having the authority which the Roman Catholics claim for him, they would have submitted at once to what he had thought proper to do. But the primitive Christians had no such idea of his authority. This claim for Peter is not only opposed to this place, but to every part of the New Testament.

LAN: 2-18 When Peter brought the news of Cornelius's conversion back to Jerusalem, the believers were shocked that Peter had eaten with Gentiles. After they heard the whole story, however, they praised God (Acts 11:18). Their reactions teach us how to handle disagreements with other Christians. Before judging the behavior of fellow believers, it is important to hear them out. The Holy Spirit may have something important to teach us through them.

Those of the circumcision refers to Jewish Christians who believed that Gentiles had to become Jews when they became Christians. The Jewish Christians had been circumcised as a seal of the Mosaic covenant and had kept the Jewish laws. They were not pleased that the Gentiles were considered equal to them in the eyes of God, based on nothing more than their faith in Christ. They wanted the Gentiles to be circumcised and to keep the Law of Moses in order to become Christians. **contended with him:** This was not a polite discussion, but an intense quarrel. The Jewish Christians were upset because Peter

⁶ Adam Clarke's Commentary on the New Testament

had broken Jewish law by going into the home of a Gentile and eating with him. The Jewish Christians justified their prejudice by claiming that it was God who had forbidden eating with Gentiles. However, the Levitical laws were not intended to teach ostracism.⁷

Acts 11:3

Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them.

[Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them] What a great sin! Eating with Gentiles! When did this become a sin (1 John 3:4)?

BBC: Peter's colleagues do not object that the members of Cornelius's household are not God-fearing (Acts 10:2); the problem is that they are not fully Jewish—Gentiles had to be circumcised to convert fully to Judaism. (This requirement is a natural inference from the law and continues to be an issue as late as Acts 15:1, 5.) Nor do they object that Peter preached Christ to Gentiles; the issue is that he ate with them even though as Gentiles they were ritually unclean (Acts 10:28; cf. Galatians 2:12).⁸

Clarke: **Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised**—In a Jew, this was no small offense; and, as they did not know the reason of St. Peter's conduct, it is no wonder they should call him to account for it, as they considered it to be a positive transgression of the law and custom of the Jews.

McGee: There was doubt and division. We need to understand that to the Jews the action of Simon Peter was a terrible thing. In fact, if we could have talked to Simon Peter a month before this, he also would have said it was a terrible thing to do. Actually, Peter gives them an apology. He makes it clear that he didn't want to do it at all, but that the Spirit of God was in the whole episode.⁹

The accusation lodged against Peter was that he **went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them**. The primary problem was not his preaching to Gentiles but his eating with them (cf. Mark 2:16; Luke 15:2; Gal. 2:12). This gives even greater significance to Peter's vision (Acts 10:9-16). Eating with someone was a mark of acceptance and fellowship (cf. 1 Cor. 5:11). This problem could have caused a serious break in the church.¹⁰

⁷ The Nelson Study Bible

⁸ Bible Background Commentary on the New Testament

⁹ McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:560). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

cf. *confer*, compare

¹⁰ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary: An exposition of the scriptures* (2:382). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Acts 11:4

But Peter rehearsed *the matter* from the beginning, and expounded *it* by order unto them, saying,

Here Peter relates the whole story (recorded in Acts 10) with a few additional circumstances.

Clarke: But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order This is the very style of St. Luke; see his Gospel, Luke 1:3. To remove their prejudice, and to give them the fullest reasons for his conduct, he thought it best to give them a simple relation of the whole affair; which he does, as we have seen in the preceding chapter, with a few additional circumstances here.

Barnes: But Peter rehearsed. Greek, Peter beginning, explained it to them in order. That is, he began with the vision which he saw, and gave a narrative of the various events in order, as they actually occurred. A simple and unvarnished statement of *facts* is usually the best way of disarming prejudice and silencing opposition. In revivals of true religion, the best way of silencing opposition, and especially among Christians, is to make a plain statement of things as they actually occurred. Opposition most commonly arises from prejudice, or from false or exaggerated statements; and those can be best removed, not by angry contention, but by an unvarnished relation of the facts. In most cases prejudice will thus be disarmed, and opposition will die away, as was the case in regard to the admission of the Gentiles to the church.

Barnes: By order. One event after another, as they happened. He thus showed that his own mind had been as much biassed as theirs, and stated in what manner his prejudices had been removed. It often happens that those who become most zealous and devoted in any new plans for the advancement of religion, were as much opposed to them at first as others. They are led from one circumstance to another, until their prejudices die away, and the Providence and Spirit of God indicate clearly their duty,

Spurgeon: See here a beautiful example of humility and patience. Peter had been directed by the Lord in what he did, and the act itself was most commendable, yet he rose and defended his conduct without anger, in a calm, loving manner, and not only exonerated himself, but won over those who had differed from him.

Peter explains his actions (11:4-17)

Peter needs to explain why he met with Cornelius and baptized him. He goes before the "circumcised believers" of Jerusalem (not the apostles!) and there recounts everything "precisely as it had happened" (11:4). That is, he recites the events related to Cornelius' conversion in sequence, point by point. In giving us a summary of what Peter says, Luke repeats, to a large degree, the material he includes in chapter 10. We need not tell the entire story again, though there are a couple of new pieces of information that should be mentioned.

Peter refers to the six circumcised disciples who go to Caesarea with him, and who also enter the home of Cornelius (11:12). The fact that he brings these six men with him

to Jerusalem suggests that he expects to be challenged. These six men are important witnesses to what happened. They are circumcised believers, and hence their credentials as pious Jews (as well as Christians) should carry weight with the church in Jerusalem. The six saw Cornelius and the other Gentiles receiving the Holy Spirit (10:45). Thus, they are witnesses to the fact that God put his stamp of approval on the whole occasion. More than this, the six believers also enter Cornelius' home, and eat with him. They are more than witnesses for the truth of Peter's story. These pious and observant Jewish Christians are also implicated in Peter's actions at the house of Cornelius. Since they are respected members of the circumcision, the fact that they are willing to be "tainted" by being in a Gentile's presence would help counter the objections being raised. Peter did not act alone.

More important, however, is that Peter can appeal to God as the One who orchestrated the meeting with Cornelius. Thus, Peter concludes his defense by saying, "If God gave them [the Cornelius group] the same gift as he gave us...who was I to think that I could oppose God?" (11:17). The important phrase here is "same gift." The Gentiles experienced something similar in all essentials to that of the original Jewish disciples at Pentecost (2:1-5). That being so, they should have an equal membership in the body of Christ.

Peter argues that he went to the home of Cornelius, baptized him, and then fellowshiped with the group in response to God's action. He didn't do this simply on his own initiative or to play fast and loose with tradition. There has been a divine motivation in all this, beginning with his vision on the roof of Simon the tanner's house. For the moment, the Jerusalem disciples are satisfied with Peter's explanation. "They had no further objections and praised God, saying, 'So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life'" (11:18). On the surface, this appears to be the end of any controversy regarding the Gentiles. But that is not the case, as we shall see later in Acts.¹¹

Acts 11:5

I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me:

Acts 11:6

Upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.

He is still amazed at God's command.

¹¹ <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts11.htm>

Acts 11:7

And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay and eat.

Acts 11:8

But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth.

LAN: God had promised throughout Scripture that he would reach the nations. This began with his general promise to Abraham (Genesis 12:3; Genesis 18:18) and became very specific in Malachi's statement: "My name will be great among the nations, from the rising to the setting of the sun" (Malachi 1:11). But this was an extremely difficult truth for Jews, even Jewish believers, to accept. The Jewish believers understood how certain prophecies were fulfilled in Christ, but they overlooked other Old Testament teachings. Too often we are inclined to accept only the parts of God's Word that appeal to us and support our own agendas, ignoring the teachings we don't like. We must accept all of God's Word as absolute truth.

JNTC: Nothing unclean or *treif* has ever entered my mouth (as at 10:12–14&N).

Kefa's hearers, the strict Circumcision faction, "zealots for the *Torah*" (21:20), are no more *Torah*-observant than Kefa himself. God chose Kefa as his instrument to bring Yeshua to the Gentiles precisely because he was an observant Jew; in this way all would know that God's hand was in it. Had a less *Torah*-true Jew seen the vision, it would have been no less of God, but observant Jews might have dismissed him as being self-serving and antinomian, as such people later regarded Sha'ul (for different reasons; 21:21, Ro 3:8).¹²

Acts 11:9

But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, *that* call not thou common.

Since Jews and Gentiles were represented by the animals, showing how God would also save the Gentiles, it was Peter's duty to preach to both. God was illustrating and emphasizing to Peter that the middle wall of partition was broken down. Already about eight years had gone by and the gospel had been withheld from Gentiles (Ephes. 2:14-16). It was time now to bring both into one fold under one shepherd (John 10:16; 1 Cor. 12:13).

¹²Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 11:8). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

Acts 11:10

And this was done three times: and all were drawn up again into heaven.

The word for “drawn up” indicates all were suddenly withdrawn into heaven.

Acts 11:11

And, behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Caesarea unto me.

[**three men**] Two servants and a soldier of Cornelius (Acts 10:7,19; Acts 11:11).

Acts 11:12

And the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man’s house:

The Holy Spirit prepared Cornelius, telling him to send for Peter. While this took place He dealt with Peter to make him willing to obey, even to go to Gentiles. God again worked with both persons concerned as in the case of Saul and Ananias (Acts 9:10-20). When God is in a matter such harmony of His dealings is evident.

LAN: Peter’s defense for eating with Gentiles was a simple restatement of what happened. He brought six witnesses with him to back him up, and then he quoted Jesus’ promise about the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 11:16). These Gentiles’ lives had been changed, and that was all the evidence Peter and the other believers needed. Changed lives are an equally powerful evidence today.

Peter had wisely taken **six brethren** with him when he visited Cornelius’s home (10:23). He anticipated the argument from “those of the circumcision” (v. 2).

Acts 11:13

And he showed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter;

Acts 11:14

Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved.

Dake: [Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved]

This is as plain as language can express a truth that Cornelius was not a saved or born-again man when he sent for Peter, and that he was not converted before Peter’s sermon (Acts 10:43-48; Acts 11:14-18; Acts 15:7-13).

Twelve Reasons Why Cornelius Was Not Saved: (Dake)

1. Acts 11:14 plainly says that the angel told Cornelius that Peter would tell him words whereby he would be saved.
2. He was no more saved than his house, for both were to be saved by the message that Peter was to give them (Acts 11:14).
3. He was not saved by his good life, as proved in the note on Acts 10:2.
4. Acts 10:6 confirms the fact of Acts 11:14 that Peter was to tell Cornelius what he must do to be saved.
5. Peter's vision breaking down his prejudice about God saving Gentiles proves that they were not yet saved (Acts 10:9-16; Acts 11:4-18).
6. Acts 10:22 again confirms the fact that Peter was to speak words to Cornelius to save him, as in Acts 11:14.
7. Acts 10:32 is the final word referring to God's command to Peter to preach the gospel that would save the Gentiles.
8. Acts 10:43 records the necessary words of salvation which Cornelius heard for the first time so he could be saved as the angel promised in Acts 11:14.
9. Acts 11:17 states when Cornelius and his house believed on the Lord. It was when Peter preached a certain part of his sermon and the Holy Ghost fell on them that heard the Word (Acts 10:43-44). They could not have believed this kind of message until they had heard it (Romans 10:14-17).
10. The apostles acknowledged that the Gentiles were granted "repentance unto life" when Peter preached to the house of Cornelius (Acts 11:18 with Acts 10:43-44).
11. Peter again testified later that it was God who made the choice among the apostles that the Gentiles "by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe" (Acts 15:7).
12. Acts 15:9 says that the hearts of the Gentiles were purified by faith when Peter preached to them.

Clarke: Thou and all thy house shall be saved—This is an additional circumstance: before, it was said, Acts 10:6, Peter shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do; and, in Acts 10:33, who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee. But, in Peter's relation, the matter is more explicitly declared, he shall tell thee words whereby thou and thy house shall be saved. He shall announce to you all the doctrine of salvation.

Barnes: And all thy house. Thy family. This is a circumstance which is omitted in the account in Acts 10. It is said, however, in Acts 10:2, that Cornelius feared God *with all his house*. And it is evident, from Acts 10:48, that the family also received the ordinance of baptism, and was received into the church.

ESV: a message by which you will be saved. Some think this implies that Cornelius was saved for the first time here. Others think he previously had saving faith (as a Gentile "God-fearer" looking forward to the Messiah), but that this meant he would experience the fullness of new covenant salvation in Christ when he heard the gospel message.

Acts 11:15

And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning.

What is implied in Chapter 10 is stated here. As verse 18 notes “then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.”

Literally, in my beginning to speak, that is, I had hardly started with what I was going to preach "when the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning" (Acts 2:1-11; Acts 10:44-48).

Now Simon Peter tells what went through his mind.

ESV: Just as on us refers to Pentecost, apparently meaning that these Gentile believers began to speak in tongues and praise God, giving convincing evidence that they had received the Holy Spirit in the same sense as did those at Pentecost. The fact that the Spirit came to Cornelius and other Gentiles without them having done anything in relationship to the Law is God's answer to the debate and settled matters as far as Peter was concerned.

Acts 11:16

Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost.

[Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost] When I heard the Gentiles speaking in other languages as we did at Pentecost, I remembered how the Lord Jesus associated this with the baptism in the Holy Ghost (Acts 11:16 with Acts 1:4-8; Matthew 3:11). I recognized that they had been baptized in the Holy Spirit as we had been at Pentecost, for it was "the like gift," so "what was I to withstand God?" (Acts 11:17).

Clarke: Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost—These words are very remarkable. The words of our Lord, as quoted Acts 1:5, to which St. Peter refers here, have been supposed by many to be referred to the apostles alone; but here it is evident that St. Peter believed they were a promise made to all Christians, i.e. to all, whether Jews or Gentiles, who should believe on Jesus Christ. Therefore, when he saw that the Holy Ghost fell upon those Gentiles, he considered it a fulfillment of our Lord's promise: ye, that is, all that will believe on me, shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost—not many days hence, i.e. in a short time this Spirit shall be given, which is to abide with you for ever. Hence we learn that the promise of the Holy Spirit is given to the whole body of Christians—to all that believe on Christ as dying for their sins, and rising for their justification.

Jesus had also demonstrated clearly that he and his message were for all people. He preached in Samaria (John 4:1-42); in the region of the Gerasenes, populated by Greeks (Mark 5:1-20); and he even reached out to Romans (Luke 7:1-10). The apostles shouldn't have been surprised that they were called to do the same.

In recounting what happened next, Peter made an important identification of the day of Pentecost with the Lord's prediction of **Spirit** baptism (1:4-5). Luke did not state specifically in chapter 2 that Pentecost was that fulfillment, but Peter here pointedly said so by the phrase **at the beginning** (cf. 10:47, "just as we have," and 11:17, "the same gift as He gave us"). The Church Age, then, began on the day of Pentecost.¹³

baptized with the Holy Spirit: This statement is found seven times in the New Testament (see also 1:5; Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; 1 Cor. 12:13). The reference is to a once-for-all act whereby Christ places believers in the care and safekeeping of the Holy Spirit until the day He returns.

Acts 11:17

Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as *he did* unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?

[**what was I, that I could withstand God?**] This is question 43 in the Book of Acts. The next question is in Acts 13:10.

BBC: Because Judaism used baptism alongside circumcision to signify conversion, if God had baptized someone in his Spirit, he had certainly accepted their conversion—with or without circumcision.

Clarke: God gave them the like gift, etc.—Viz. the Holy Spirit, and its various gifts and graces, in the same way and in the same measure in which he gave them to us Jews. What was I, that I could withstand God? It was not I who called them to salvation: it was God; and the thing is proved to be from God alone, for none other could dispense the Holy Spirit.

Barnes: What was I. What power or right had I to oppose the manifest will of God that the Gentiles should be received into the Christian church.

Withstand God. Oppose or resist God. He had indicated his will; he had showed his intention to save the Gentiles; and the prejudices of Peter were all overcome. One of the best means of destroying prejudice and false opinions, is a powerful revival of religion. More erroneous doctrines and unholy feelings are overcome in such scenes, than in all the angry controversies, and bigoted and fierce contentions, that have ever taken place. If men wish to root error out of the church, they should strive by all means to promote everywhere revivals of pure and undefiled religion. The Holy Spirit more easily and effectually silences false doctrine, and destroys heresy, than all the denunciations of fierce theologians; all the alarms of professed zeal for truth; and all the anathemas which professed orthodoxy and love for the purity of the church ever uttered from the icebergs on which such champions usually seek their repose and their home.

cf. *confer*, compare

¹³Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (2:382). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

The purpose of the tongues was to give evidence to Simon Peter that the Holy Spirit had actually “fallen on them.” How else would he have known that they had been baptized by the Holy Spirit which placed them in the body of believers?

Then remembered I the word ... John ... baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost. Forasmuch then, &c.—that is, “Since God Himself has put them on a level with ourselves, by bestowing on them what the Lord Jesus pronounced the higher baptism of the Holy Ghost, would it not have been to withstand God if I had withheld from them the lower baptism of water, and kept aloof from them as still ‘unclean?’”¹⁴

ESV: stand in God's way. Here Peter used the same word (Gk. *kōlyō*) as in the earlier account of Cornelius's conversion (10:47, “withhold”), and the Ethiopian eunuch used the same word at the time of his conversion (8:36). As these three examples demonstrate, God was expanding the church to include Gentiles, and no one should try to “prevent” or “stand in the way” of that. Though Peter did not explicitly refer to baptism, it was probably implicit in the use of this word: Peter knew he could not refuse to allow these new believers to be baptized and thereby give outward evidence that they were full members of the church.

Controversy continues

The conservative Jewish Christians acknowledge that Gentiles can receive the Holy Spirit before living the Jewish life. After all, Peter and the six witnesses show, through the miracles involved in the conversion of Cornelius, that God is behind the salvation of Gentiles. Perhaps they allow that Peter, in this extraordinary circumstance, needed to fellowship with uncircumcised Gentiles.

However, some in the church will claim that Gentiles should, after conversion, begin to fulfill all the requirements of the Torah, such as circumcision. Only after doing so can they be saved. No doubt, the more zealous members of the Jerusalem church point out that many problems will be created in allowing formerly pagan Gentiles to fellowship with observant Jews. The Gentiles will ritually “defile” the Christian Jews and will then make it difficult for them to fellowship with non-Christian Jews.

The Jerusalem believers might also be concerned about the results if a large number of Gentiles become part of the church. What will that do to the standing of the church in Jerusalem? After all, the church is being closely watched by the Jewish leaders to see if it is upholding the standards of Judaistic worship. Any suspicion about the church fraternizing with Gentiles will create suspicion and rancor in the Jewish community. This will be a problem in other cities with a large Jewish population in which large-scale Gentile evangelization and conversion occur.

These issues are not solved nor even taken up by the Jerusalem church at this time. However, the questions will continue to linger — until the apostles find it necessary to call an unprecedented council (Acts 15). Meanwhile, the Jerusalem congregation struggles to remain acceptable to the Jewish authorities. If they fail in this regard, they

¹⁴Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. On spine: Critical and explanatory commentary. (Ac 11:16). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

will suffer the fate of the Hellenistic Jewish Christians who were persecuted and expelled (8:1).

Such fears may cause the Jerusalem mother church to acknowledge James as its leader, rather than any of the apostles. (The apostles probably agree that such a course is best, and in any case they are soon obliged to leave the city themselves.) James is known to be a scrupulous practitioner of the Torah, for which he is called "James the Just," or "James the Righteous." He enjoys a good reputation with the Jewish community. This will help diffuse any potential crisis with the Sanhedrin over the "Gentile question."¹⁵

Acts 11:18

When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.

[When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God] When the Jewish Christians and apostles at Jerusalem (Acts 11:1) heard this story of God changing Peter's attitude toward Gentiles, of the salvation of Gentiles, and of their receiving the Spirit baptism in spite of Jewish opposition, then they began to withdraw their opposition, submitting to the will of God to preach and save both Jews and Gentiles. The unwillingness to receive Gentiles into the church further proves its divine origin. For if it had been a false church and a false religion its first propagators would have crossed land and sea to make proselytes, and, like false religions in all ages, would have yielded to every accommodation of the opinions, prejudices, and practices of God regarding the preaching to and saving of both Jews and Gentiles.¹⁶

[also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life] This with Acts 11:3 further proves that Cornelius was not a proselyte to Judaism.

The believers in Jerusalem marvel that God has given "even the Gentiles" (NIV, NRSV; not "also"—KJV, NASB, TEV) the gift. Jewish people believed that Gentiles could be saved by converting to Judaism; many also believed that Gentiles could be saved simply by being righteous and keeping the seven laws God gave to Noah (according to Jewish tradition). But until now no one had believed that Gentiles could be saved on the same terms as Jewish people, who had been chosen for salvation by God's sovereign grace.¹⁷

¹⁵ <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts11.htm>

¹⁶ Dake Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

Gentiles ***Gentile**. Anyone who is not Jewish. In ancient Jewish parlance, this was often the equivalent of "pagan."

NIV New International Version

NRSV New Revised Standard Version

KJV King James Version

NASB New American Standard Bible

TEV Today's English Version

grace **Grace**. In the New Testament, the term generally represents the Old Testament concept of God's covenant love, which was expressed in passages like Deuteronomy 4:37, 7:7-9 and 10:15.

¹⁷ Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary : New Testament* (Ac 11:18). Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

BBC: The believers in Jerusalem marvel that God has given “even the Gentiles” (NIV, NRSV; not “also”—KJV, NASB, TEV) the gift. Jewish people believed that Gentiles could be saved by converting to Judaism; many also believed that Gentiles could be saved simply by being righteous and keeping the seven laws God gave to Noah (according to Jewish tradition). But until now no one had believed that Gentiles could be saved on the same terms as Jewish people, who had been chosen for salvation by God’s sovereign grace.

Clarke: They held their peace—Their prejudices were confounded; they considered the subject, and saw that it was from God; then they glorified him, because they saw that he had granted unto the Gentiles repentance unto life. As the word which we translate repentance, signifies literally a change of mind, it may be here referred to a change of religious views, etc. And as repentance signifies a change of life and conduct, from evil to good, so the word μετανοια may be used here to signify a change from a false religion to the true one; from idolatry, to the worship of the true God. Rosenmuller thinks that, in several cases, where it is spoken of the Jews, it signifies their change from a contempt of the Messiah to reverence for him, and the consequent embracing of the Christian religion.

The Christians who were present were all satisfied with St. Peter’s account and apology; but it does not appear that all were ultimately satisfied, as we know there were serious disputes in the Church afterwards on this very subject: see Acts 15:5, etc., where Christian believers, from among the Pharisees, insisted that it was necessary to circumcise the converted Gentiles, and cause them to keep the law of Moses. This opinion was carried much farther in the Church at Jerusalem afterwards, as may be seen at large in Acts 21:21, etc.

Barnes: They held their peace. They were convinced, as Peter had been, by the manifest indications of the will of God.

Then hath God, etc. The great truth is in this manner established, that the doors of the church are opened to the entire Gentile world—a great and glorious truth, that was worthy of this remarkable interposition. It at once changed the views of the apostles and of the early Christians; gave them new, large, and liberal conceptions of the gospel; broke down all their long-cherished prejudices; taught them to look upon all men as their brethren; and impressed their hearts with the truth, never after to be eradicated, that the Christian church was founded for the wide world, and opened the same glorious pathway to life wherever man might be found, whether with the narrow prejudice of the Jew, or amidst the degradations of the pagan world. To this truth we owe our hopes; for this, we should thank the God of heaven; and impressed with it, we should seek to invite the entire world to partake with us of the rich provisions of the gospel of the blessed God.

LAN: The intellectual questions ended and the theological discussion stopped with the report that God had given the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles. This was a turning point for the early church. They had to accept those whom God had chosen, even if they were Gentiles. But joy over the conversion of Gentiles was not unanimous. This continued to be a struggle for some Jewish Christians throughout the first century.

Even the Judaizers had to shut their mouths now. They had nothing more to say in objection, because this obviously was of God. So they glorified God. This was a great day—the door had been opened to the Gentiles! We see now that the stage is being set for the gospel to move out to the ends of the earth.

we entered the man’s house—No mention of Cornelius’ name, much less of his high position, as if that affected the question. To the charge, “Thou wentest in to *men* uncircumcised,” he simply speaks of the uncircumcised “*man*” to whom he had been divinely sent.¹⁸

Then hath God also granted to the Gentiles, &c.—rather, “granted to the Gentiles also.” (See a similar misplacement of “also” in Heb 12:1). To “*grant* repentance unto life”—that is, “such as issues in life” (compare 2Co 7:10, “repentance unto salvation”)—is more than to be willing to pardon upon repentance [GROTIUS]. The case of Cornelius is so manifestly one of *grace* reigning in every stage of his religious history, that we can hardly doubt that this was just the feature of it which they meant here to express. *And this is the grace that reigns in every conversion.*¹⁹

With Peter the saints recognized that the conversion of **Gentiles** was initiated by **God** and that they should not stand in His way. This response had two ensuing and significant results. First, it preserved the unity of the body of Christ, the church. Second, it drove a huge wedge between Church-Age believers and temple-worshippers in Jerusalem. Before this the common Jewish people looked on Christians with favor (cf. 2:47; 5:13, 26), but soon thereafter the Jews opposed the church. This antagonism is attested by Israel’s response to the execution of James (12:2-3; cf. 12:11). Perhaps this concourse with Gentiles was a starting point of the Jewish opposition.²⁰

JNTC: The observant Jews in the Messianic Community were amazed that Gentiles could become part of God’s people, part of the Body of the Messiah, without first becoming Jews. But today the situation is exactly the opposite: many Gentile Christians are amazed at a movement of Messianic Jews that claims Jews can accept the Jewish Messiah, Yeshua, without taking on the lifestyle of Gentiles. The more things change, the more they stay the same! In both cases it is the expectations of the “in-group” that God overturns. See 1:1, 15:1.²¹

¹⁸Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. On spine: Critical and explanatory commentary. (Ac 11:12). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

¹⁹Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. On spine: Critical and explanatory commentary. (Ac 11:18). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

cf. *confer*, compare

²⁰Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (2:382). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

²¹Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 11:18). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

BEC: 1-18 Peter no sooner returned to Jerusalem when he was met by members of the strong legalistic party in the church of Judea (“they that were of the circumcision”) who rebuked him for fellowshiping with Gentiles and eating with them. Keep in mind that these Jewish believers did not yet understand the relationship between Law and grace, Jews and Gentiles, and Israel and the church. Most Christians today understand these truths; but, after all, we have Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, and Hebrews! There were many converted priests in the church who would be zealous for the Law (Acts 6:7), and even the ordinary Jewish believer would have a difficult time making the transition (Acts 21:20). It was not only a matter of religion, but also of culture; and cultural habits are very hard to break.

The phrase “contended with him” comes from the same word translated “doubting nothing” in Acts 10:20 and 11:12. It means “to make a difference.” These legalists were making a difference between the Gentiles and the Jews after Peter had demonstrated that “there is no difference!” God had declared the Gentiles “clean,” that is, accepted before God on the same basis as the Jews—through faith in Jesus Christ.

Peter had nothing to fear. After all, he had only followed orders from the Lord; and the Spirit had clearly confirmed the salvation of the Gentiles. Peter reviewed the entire experience from beginning to end; and, when he was finished, the Jewish legalists dropped their charges and glorified God for the salvation of the Gentiles (Acts 11:18). However, this did not end the matter completely, for this same legalistic party later debated with Paul about the salvation of the Gentiles (Acts 14:26–15:2). Even after the Jerusalem Conference, legalistic teachers continued to attack Paul and invade the churches he founded. They wanted to woo the believers into a life of obedience to the Law (Gal. 1:6ff; Phil. 3:1–3, 17–21). It is possible that many of these legalists were genuine believers, but they did not understand their freedom in Jesus Christ (Gal. 5:1ff).

In his personal defense in Acts 11, Peter presented three pieces of evidence: the vision from God (Acts 11:5–11), the witness of the Spirit (Acts 11:12–15, 17), and the witness of the Word (Acts 11:16). Of course, none of these men had seen the vision, but they trusted Peter’s report, for they knew that he had been as orthodox as they in his personal life (Acts 10:14). He was not likely to go to the Gentiles on his own and then invent a story to back it up.

The witness of the Spirit was crucial, for this was God’s own testimony that He had indeed saved the Gentiles. It is interesting that Peter had to go *all the way back to Pentecost* to find an example of what happened in the home of Cornelius! This suggests that a dramatic “baptism of the Spirit” (Acts 11:16), accompanied by speaking in tongues, was not an everyday occurrence in the early church. Peter could not use the experience of the Samaritans as his example, because the Samaritans received the gift of the Spirit through the laying on of the Apostles’ hands (Acts 8:14–17). Cornelius and his household received the Spirit the moment they trusted Christ. This is the pattern for today.²²

Spurgeon: Would to God that all differences would end so sweetly. Probably they would, if all who are accused would defend themselves in as kindly a spirit as Peter did.

²²Wiersbe, W. W. (1996, c1989). *The Bible exposition commentary*. "An exposition of the New Testament comprising the entire 'BE' series"--Jkt. (Ac 11:1). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

ESV: they glorified God. Though it is taken for granted today that Gentiles can become Christians, it was an astounding realization for these Jewish Christians in Jerusalem that **to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.** On repentance, see note on 2:38. This move was significant given the history of tension between Gentiles and Jews, especially in light of the Maccabean War. Reconciliation is a key theme of the gospel.

Acts 11:19

Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only.

The Jewish Christians that were forced to flee from the persecution of Acts 8:1-2 went into Phenice, Cyprus, and Antioch establishing Jewish churches.

Phoenicia: strip of Mediterranean coast between Caesarea, northward 100 miles, ½ way to Antioch. A country between Galilee and Syria, along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, including Tyre and Sidon (Acts 15:3; Acts 21:2; Acts 27:12).

Cyprus: rich and productive island Southwest of Seleucia. An island in the Mediterranean Sea (Acts 4:36; Acts 11:19-20; Acts 13:4; Acts 15:39; Acts 21:3,16; Acts 27:4).

Antioch: 3rd greatest city, after Rome and Alexandria. N of Damascus from the mountain range of AntiLibanus flows the ancient river Orontes, flowing N 200 miles bends westward by the mountain chain of Amanus, after SW less than 20 miles it empties into the Mediterranean. At the bend of this river, on its left bank, Seleucus Nicator, one of Alexander's greatest generals and successors, and the founder of the Seleucid dynasty of Greek kings of Syria, built the city of Antioch in 300 B.C. as the capital of the Syrian empire. Enjoying unequalled advantages—natural and geographical—it rose to be the Queen of the East. (Harbor at Seleucia on the Mediterranean; open country lying to the east of Lebanon range) Grove of Daphne; main street was 4 miles long... (Acts 6:5; Acts 11:19-27; Acts 13:1; Acts 14:26; Acts 15:22-35; Galatians 2:11).

BBC: Antioch on the Orontes in Syria was the third largest urban center of antiquity (after Rome and Alexandria), with an estimated population of half a million, and was the headquarters of Rome's Syrian legion. With a famous cult center of Apollo within walking distance and Seleucia, its port city off the Mediterranean coast, only a brief river journey, it boasted numerous mystery cults and was known for its pagan religious diversity.

Because of its cultural pluralism, it included an upwardly mobile and *generally* accepted Jewish element with many "God-fearers" (see Acts 10:2) and was far less segregated than Alexandria. Some more liberal non-Palestinian Jewish people saw their witness to the God of Israel among the Gentiles as making monotheism reasonable and contacting the best in pagan philosophy; circumcision was to them a lesser issue. Thus

Antioch was a more natural place for Gentiles to hear the gospel without circumcision than Judea was (Acts 15:1).

[Jews only] As yet they had not heard of the vision of Peter or of the conclusion of the Jewish Christians in Judea (Acts 11:1-18).

BBC: The large Jewish communities in Phoenicia, Cyprus (Acts 4:36) and Antioch were natural places for Jewish Christians to settle after Acts 8:1-4.

Clarke: Unto the Jews only—For they knew nothing of the vision of St. Peter; and did not believe that God would open the door of faith to the Gentiles. The next verse informs us that there were others who were better instructed. See below.

Clarke: The persecution that arose about Stephen—That is, those who were obliged to flee from Jerusalem at the time of that persecution in which Stephen lost his life. See Acts 8:1.

Barnes: Now they, This verse introduces a new train of historical remark; and from this point the course of the history of the Acts of the Apostles takes a new direction. Thus far, the history had recorded chiefly the preaching of the gospel to the Jews only. From this point the history records the efforts made to convert the Gentiles. It begins with the labours put forth in the important city of Antioch, Acts 11:19,20 and as, during the work of grace that occurred in that city, the labours of the apostle Paul were especially sought, Acts 11:25,26, the sacred writer thenceforward confines the history mainly to his travels and labours.

LAN: 19-21 When the church accepted Peter's testimony that the gospel was also for Gentiles, Christianity exploded into Gentile areas, and large numbers became believers. The seeds of this missionary work had been sown after Stephen's death when many believing Jews were persecuted and scattered, settling in faraway cities and spreading the gospel.

Nelson: This **persecution** began when Stephen was murdered for his faith (ch. 7). God often uses tough times to accomplish His will. Jesus said, "You shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (1:8). God allowed persecution to be the impetus for spreading Christ's witness throughout the land. Those who face such persecution will receive "great reward" in heaven (see Matt. 5:10–12). **the Jews only:** At this time it was primarily the Jewish believers who were being persecuted. Consequently, the Jewish Christians were the ones who were moving out and sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ in various regions. They shared the gospel with the Jews because they still met in the local synagogues and held on to many of the Jewish customs.

ESV: The **persecution that arose over Stephen** (see 8:1, 4) caused believers to be **scattered** and led to the spread of the word among Jews in various outlying regions. **Phoenicia** was in the area of present-day Lebanon, its primary cities being Tyre, Sidon,

and Ptolemais. (For Christian communities there, see 21:3–7.) **Cyprus** was 100 miles (161 km) off the coast. The primary language of these areas was Greek, as it was for **Antioch** (modern Antakya), the largest city of the area and capital of the Roman province of Syria, with a population of a half million or more. Only Rome and Alexandria were larger in ancient times. At Antioch, an island bearing a palace and a hippodrome stood in the middle of the Orontes River. Bridges connected the island to the main city. In the first century the main city contained an aqueduct, baths, two theaters, temples (e.g., to Artemis and to Herakles), the Pantheon, and the Kaisareion (a basilica dedicated to the imperial cult). Prior to Paul's arrival, an earthquake in 37 b.c. had devastated Antioch, but the emperor Gaius (Caligula) helped rebuild it. Antioch periodically hosted Olympic-style games. Its great colonnaded and marble-paved road had been sponsored in part by Herod the Great. **speaking the word to no one except Jews.** These people had not yet heard about the events of 10:1–11:18.

Preaching expands (11:19)

Regardless of doubts and questions by some of the members, the Jerusalem mother congregation confirms Peter's action in baptizing the first Gentiles living in Judea. More importantly, God is showing his will that Gentiles should receive salvation and become part of the spiritual community, the church.

The stage is now set for Gentile evangelization. Luke is ready to launch into the main theme of his book, which is to show the expansion of gospel and the church throughout the Roman world. Luke leaves Peter in Jerusalem, to whom he will return in chapter 12 and then again briefly in chapter 15. After that, we won't hear of him again, and Luke will focus on Paul.²³

Acts 11:20

And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus.

Cyrene lay on the south shore of Mediterranean, between Carthage and Egypt. (Matthew 27:32; Acts 2:10; Acts 6:9; Acts 11:20; Acts 13:1).

Simon of Cyrene, who carried Jesus' cross, was from here.

[Grecians] Greek speaking Jews living in Greek cities (Acts 6:1; Acts 9:29; Acts 11:20).

Clarke: Men of—Cyrene—The metropolis of the Cyrenaica; a country of Africa, bounded on the east by Marmarica, on the west by the Regio Syrtica, on the north by the Mediterranean, and on the south by the Sahara. Cyrene is now called Cairoan. This city, according to Eusebius, was built in the 37th Olympiad, about 630 years before Christ. In consequence of a revolt of its inhabitants, it was destroyed by the Romans; but they afterwards rebuilt it. It was for a long time subject to the Arabs, but is now in the hands of the Turks.

²³ <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts11.htm>

Spake unto the Grecians The Hellenists. Who these were, we have already seen Acts 6 and Acts 9:29, viz. Jews living in Greek cities and speaking the Greek language. But, instead of Grecians, Greeks, is the reading of AD*, Syriac, all the Arabic, Coptic, Ethiopic, Vulgate, some copies of the Itala, Eusebius, Chrysostom, Theophylact, and Oecumenius. On this evidence, Griesbach has admitted it into the text; and few critics entertain any doubt of the genuineness of the reading. This intimates that, besides preaching the Gospel to the Hellenistic Jews, some of them preached it to heathen Greeks; for, were we to adopt the common reading, it would be a sort of *actum agere*; for it is certain that the Hellenistic Jews had already received the Gospel. See Acts 6:1. And it is likely that these Cyprians and Cyrenians had heard of Peter's mission to Caesarea, and they followed his example by offering the Christian faith to the heathen. It is worthy of remark that the Jews generally called all nations of the world Greeks; as the Asiatics, to the present day, call all the nations of Europe Franks.

Barnes: Spake unto the Grecian. To the Hellenists. This word usually denotes, in the New Testament, those Jews residing in foreign lands who spoke the Greek language. Acts 6:1. But to them the gospel had been already preached; and yet in this place it is evidently the intention of Luke to affirm, that the men of Cyprus and Cyrene preached to those who were *not* Jews, and that thus their conduct was distinguished from those Acts 11:19 who preached to the Jews only. It is thus manifest that we are here required to understand the *Gentiles*, as those who were addressed by the men of Cyprus and Cyrene. In many Mss. the word used here is *Greeks*, instead of *Hellenists*. This reading has been adopted by Griesbach, and is found in the Syriac, the Arabic, the Vulgate, and in many of the Fathers. The Aethiopic version reads, "to the Gentiles." There is no doubt that this is the true reading; and that the sacred writer means to say that the gospel was here preached to those who were not Jews, for all were called Greeks by them who were not Jews, Romans 1:16. The connexion would lead us to suppose that they had heard of what had been done by Peter, and that, imitating his example, they preached the gospel now to the Gentiles also.

LAN: 20-21 It was in Antioch that Christianity was launched on its worldwide mission and where the believers aggressively preached to the Gentiles (non-Jews who did not worship God). Philip had preached in Samaria, but the Samaritans were part Jewish (Acts 8:5); Peter preached to Cornelius, but he already worshiped God (Acts 10:2). Believers who were scattered after the outbreak of persecution in Jerusalem spread the gospel to other Jews in the lands they fled to (Acts 11:19). At this time, the believers began actively sharing the Good News with Gentiles.

The "Grecians," are Jews who spoke Greek and were Greek in their customs. So far, the preaching has been to Jews only.

Acts 11:21

And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.

[hand of the Lord was with them] This means that God confirmed His Word through them with signs and wonders (Acts 4:30; Acts 13:11).

[turned unto the Lord] Were converted. Conversion means right about face (Psalm 19:7; Matthew 18:3; Acts 3:19; James 5:19-20; Psalm 51:13).

Clarke: The hand of the Lord was with them—By the hand, arm, and, finger of God, in the Scripture, different displays or exertions of his power are intended. Here it means that the energy of God accompanied them, and applied their preaching to the souls of all attentive hearers. Without this accompanying influence, even an apostle could do no good; and can inferior men hope to be able to convince and convert sinners without this? Ministers of the word of God, so called, who dispute the necessity and deny the being of this influence, show thereby that they are intruders into God's heritage; that they are not sent by him, and shall not profit the people at all.

Clarke: A great number believed—That Jesus was the Christ; and that he had died for their offenses, and risen again for their justification. Because the apostles preached the truth, and the hand of God was with them, therefore, a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord, becoming his disciples, and taking him for their portion.

Acts 11:22

Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch.

[church which was in Jerusalem] This was the original church, the mother church of Christianity.

[they sent forth Barnabas] The early church began to send forth qualified ministers but only in cooperation with the Holy Spirit who directed all things (Acts 11:22; Acts 8:29,39; Acts 10:19; Acts 11:12; Acts 13:2-4; Acts 15:28; Acts 16:7; Acts 20:28; Acts 21:11).

Clarke: The Church which was in Jerusalem—This was the original, the mother Church of Christianity; not the Church of Rome; there were Christian Churches founded in many places, which exist to the present day, before Rome heard the Gospel of the kingdom. A Christian Church means a company of believers in Christ Jesus, united for the purposes of Christian fellowship, and edification in righteousness.

Clarke: They sent forth Barnabas—It seems, then, that the Church collectively had power to commission and send forth any of its own members, whom it saw God had qualified for a particular work. There must have been, even at that time, an acknowledged

superiority of some members of the Church beyond others. The apostles held the first rank; the deacons (probably the same as those called prophets, as being next chosen) the second; and perhaps those called evangelists, simply preachers of the truth, the third rank. Those who knew most of God and sacred things, who were most zealous, most holy, and most useful, undoubtedly had the pre-eminence.

Barnes: Then tidings, The church at Jerusalem heard of this. It was natural that so remarkable an occurrence as the conversion of the Gentiles, and the extraordinary success of the gospel in a splendid and mighty city, should be reported at Jerusalem, and excite deep interest there.

And they sent forth. To aid the disciples there, and to give them their sanction. They had done a similar thing in the revival which occurred in Samaria. Acts 8:14.

Barnabas. See Acts 4:36,37. He was a native of Cyprus, and was probably well acquainted with Antioch. He was, therefore, peculiarly qualified for the work on which they sent him.

LAN: With the exception of Jerusalem, Antioch of Syria played a more important role in the early church than any other city. After Rome and Alexandria, Antioch was the largest city in the Roman world. In Antioch, the first Gentile church was founded, and there the believers were first called Christians (Acts 11:26). Paul used the city as his home base during his missionary journeys. Antioch was the center of worship for several pagan cults that promoted much sexual immorality and other forms of evil common to pagan religions. It was also a vital commercial center—the gateway to the eastern world. Antioch was a key city both to Rome and to the early church.

LAN: 22-26 Barnabas gives us a wonderful example of how to help new Christians. He demonstrated strong faith; he ministered joyfully with kindness and encouragement; he taught new believers further lessons about God (see Acts 9:26-30). Remember Barnabas when you see new believers, and think of ways to help them grow in their faith.

Acts 11:23

Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.

Exhorted them. Barnabas = “son of comfort,” “son of exhortation.”

Seven Characteristics of a Good Minister (Dake)

1. He obeys orders (Acts 11:22-23).
2. He recognizes God's work (Acts 11:23).
3. He is happy, not envious, because God blesses other ministers (Acts 11:23).
4. He exhorts the people to cleave to God and not backslide (Acts 11:23).
5. He is a good man (Acts 11:24).
6. He is full of the Holy Spirit (Acts 11:24).
7. He is full of faith (Acts 11:24).

Result: blesses many people (Acts 11:24).

[exhorted them all] Men must always be exhorted to purpose in heart to cleave to God lest they drift, become indifferent and lukewarm and spewed out (Rev. 3:16).

[cleave] Greek: *prosmeno* (GSN-4357), abide with. Here; Acts 18:18; Matthew 15:32; Mark 8:2; 1 Tim. 1:3; 1 Tim. 5:5. Why exhort to do this if there is no danger of being separated from God?

Clarke: Had seen the grace of God—That is, had seen the effects produced by the grace of God. By the grace of God, we are to understand:

1. His favor.
2. The manifestations of that favor in the communication of spiritual blessings. And,
3. Principles of light, life, holiness, etc., producing effects demonstrative of the causes from which they sprung.

Barnabas saw that these people were objects of the Divine approbation; that they were abundantly blessed and edified together as a Christian Church; and that they had received especial influences from God, by his indwelling Spirit, which were to them incentives to faith, hope, and love, and also principles of conduct.

Clarke: Was glad—Not envious because God had blessed the labors of others of his Master's servants, but rejoiced to find that the work of salvation was carried on by such instruments as God chose, and condescended to use. They who cannot rejoice in the conversion of sinners, because they have not been the means of it, or because such converts or their ministers have not precisely the same views of certain doctrines which they have themselves, show that they have little, if anything, of the mind that was in Christ, in them.

Clarke: With purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord—These converts had begun well; they must continue and persevere: God gave them the grace, the principle of life and action; it was their business to use this. If they did not, the gift would be resumed. Barnabas well knew that they must have the grace of God in them to enable them to do any good; but he knew, also, that its being in them did not necessarily imply that it must continue there. God had taught him that if they were not workers together with that grace they would receive it in vain; i.e., the end for which it was given would not be answered. He therefore exhorted them, with determination of heart, with set, fixed purpose and resolution, that they would cleave unto the Lord, to remain with the Lord; to continue in union and fellowship with him; to be faithful in keeping his truth, and obedient in the practice of it. To be a Christian is to be united to Christ, to be of one spirit with him: to continue to be a Christian is to continue in that union. It is absurd to talk of being children of God, and of absolute, final perseverance, when the soul has lost its spiritual union. There is no perseverance but in cleaving to the Lord: he who in his works denies him does not cleave to him. Such a one is not of God; if he ever had the salvation of God, he has lost it; he is fallen from grace; nor is there a word in the book of God, fairly and honestly understood, that says such a person shall absolutely and unavoidably arise from his fall.

Barnes: It is a resolution of the mind in regard to future conduct; and the doctrine of Barnabas here was, undoubtedly, that it should be a regular, fixed, determined *plan*, or *design*, in their minds, that they would henceforward adhere to God. This plan must be formed by all Christians in the beginning of their Christian life, and without such a plan there can be no evidence of piety. We may also remark that such a plan is one of the *heart*. It is not simply of the *understanding*, but is of the entire mind, including the *will* and affections. It is the leading principle; the strongest affection; the guiding purpose of the will to adhere to God. And unless this is the prevalent, governing desire of the heart, there can be no evidence of conversion.

JNTC: The Lord Yeshua. An examination of the evangelistic contexts of the book of Acts shows that to Gentiles Yeshua was not usually proclaimed as Messiah, because the concept of “Messiah” (Mt 1:1N) was meaningful only to Jews (2:31, 36, 38; 3:18, 20; 4:10; 5:42; 8:5, 12; 9:22, 34; 17:3; 18:5, 28; 24:24; 26:23) or to Gentiles who knew Judaism well (10:36). Rather, he was announced to Gentiles as Lord, an authoritative figure who is the final judge and through whom, if they have faith, come forgiveness and incorporation into God’s people (here; 13:12, 48–49; 14:3; 15:35–36; 16:14–15, 31–32; 17:24; 19:10, 24). Later, after they had been taught about Yeshua’s role as the Jewish king of the Jewish nation to whom they had joined themselves by their trust (Ro 11:17–24&NN), they could be expected to understand communications about him as the Messiah (15:26, 20:21).²⁴

Acts 11:24

For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord.

BBC: Barnabas trusts God’s work in people (Acts 9:27; Acts 15:37-39). Later sources often extolled an earlier Jewish sage named Hillel for his gentleness and for being willing to accept Gentiles as they were and to lead them on from there, unlike many of his contemporaries.

Clarke: For he was a good man—Here is a proper character of a minister of the Gospel.

1. He is a good man: his bad heart is changed; his evil dispositions rooted out; and the mind that was in Christ implanted in him.
2. He is full of the Holy Ghost. He is holy, because the Spirit of holiness dwells in him: he has not a few transient visitations or drawings from that Spirit; it is a resident in his soul, and it fills his heart. It is light in his understanding; it is discrimination in his judgment; it is fixed purpose and determination in righteousness in his will; it is purity, it is love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, meekness, temperance, and fidelity in his affections and passions. In a word, it has sovereign sway in his heart; it governs all passions, and is the motive and principle of every righteous action.

²⁴Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 11:20). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

3. He was full of faith. He implicitly credited his Lord; he knew that he could not lie—that his word could not fail; he expected, not only the fulfillment of all promises, but also every degree of help, light, life, and comfort, which God might at any time see necessary for his Church, he prayed for the Divine blessing, and he believed that he should not pray in vain. His faith never failed, because it laid hold on that God who could not change. Behold, ye preachers of the Gospel! an original minister of Christ. Emulate his piety, his faith, and his usefulness.

Clarke: **Much people was added unto the Lord**—No wonder, when they had such a minister, preaching by the power of the Holy Ghost, such a Gospel as that of Jesus Christ.

Barnes: **For he was a good man.** This is given as a reason why he was so eminently successful. It is not said that he was a man of distinguished talents or learning; that he was a splendid or an imposing preacher; but simply that he was a pious, humble man of God. He was honest, and devoted to his master's work. We should not undervalue talent, eloquence, or learning in the ministry; but we may remark, that humble piety will often do more in the conversion of souls than the most splendid talents. No endowments can be a substitute for this. The real power of a minister is concentrated in this; and without this his ministry will be barrenness and a curse. There is nothing on this earth so mighty as *goodness*. If a man wished to make the most of his powers, the true secret would be found in employing them for a good object, and suffering them to be wholly under the direction of benevolence. John Howard's purpose *to do good* has made a more permanent impression on the interests of the world than the mad ambition of Alexander or Caesar. Perhaps the expression, "he was a good man," means that he was a man of a kind, amiable, and sweet disposition.

Full of the Holy Ghost. Was entirely under the influence of the Holy Spirit. He was eminently a pious man. This is the second qualification here mentioned of a good minister. He was not merely exemplary for mildness and kindness of temper, but he was eminently a man of God. He was filled with the influences of the sacred Spirit, producing zeal, love, peace, joy, etc. See Galatians 5:22,23. Comp. Acts 2:4.

And of faith. Confidence in the truth and promises of God. This is the *third* qualification mentioned; and this was another cause of his success. He confided in God. He trusted to his promises. He depended not on his own strength, but on the strength of the arm of God. With these qualifications he engaged in his work, and he was successful. These qualifications should be sought by the ministry of the gospel. Others should not indeed be neglected, but a man's ministry will usually be successful only as he seeks to possess those endowments which distinguished Barnabas—a kind, tender, benevolent heart; devoted piety; the fulness of the Spirit's influence; and strong, unwavering confidence in the promises and power of God.

McGee: This is a wonderful thing that is said about Barnabas. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit, and full of faith. And, my friend, there is no reason why every Christian shouldn't be a good person.

Barnabas became the pastor of the church there. He began "exhorting," which would be preaching and teaching. And the congregation grew, for "much people was added unto the Lord." As the church grew, it became evident to Barnabas that he needed an assistant pastor, and he knew where to get a good one.

Acts 11:25

Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul:

Barnabas is the first to recognize the genuineness of Saul's conversion. It is interesting that when he goes to Antioch and sees action he does not return to Jerusalem, instead he tracks down Saul in Tarsus. Tarsus was about a hundred miles to the north; this trip would be a major undertaking.

[seek Saul] Persecution drove Paul home (Acts 9:29-30). Now his training in schools of Greek philosophy, his eloquence and logic were needed among the polished scholars of Antioch, capital of Syria and third city of importance in all the Roman Empire, Rome and Alexandria alone being more eminent.

Barnes: Then departed, *Why* Barnabas sought Saul, is not known. It is probable, however, that it was owing to the remarkable success which he had in Antioch. There was a great revival of religion; and there was need of additional labour. In such scenes the ministers of the gospel need additional help, as men in harvest-time seek the aid of others. Saul was in this vicinity, Acts 9:30 and he was eminently fitted to aid in this work. With him Barnabas was well acquainted, Acts 9:27 and probably there was no other one in that vicinity whom he could obtain.

LAN: Saul had been sent to his home in Tarsus for protection after his conversion caused an uproar among the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem (Acts 9:26-30). He stayed there for several years before Barnabas brought him to help the church at Antioch.

Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus for to seek Saul—Of course, this was after the hasty despatch of Saul to Tarsus, no doubt by Barnabas himself among others, to escape the fury of the Jews at Jerusalem. And as Barnabas was the first to take the converted persecutor by the hand and procure his recognition as a disciple by the brethren at Jerusalem (Ac 9:27), so he alone seems at that early period to have discerned in him those peculiar endowments by virtue of which he was afterwards to eclipse all others. Accordingly, instead of returning to Jerusalem, to which, no doubt, he sent accounts of his proceedings from time to time, finding that the mine in Antioch was rich in promise and required an additional and powerful hand to work, he leaves it for a time, takes a journey to Tarsus, “finds Saul” (seemingly implying—not that he lay hid [BENGEL], but that he was engaged at the time in some preaching circuit—see on Ac 15:23), and returns with him to Antioch. Nor were his hopes disappointed. As co-pastors, for the time being, of the Church there, they so labored that the Gospel, even in that great and many-sided community, achieved for itself a name which will live and be gloried in as long as this world lasts, as the symbol of all that is most precious to the fallen family of man:—“*The disciples were called CHRISTIANS first in Antioch.*” This name originated not within, but without, the Church; not with their *Jewish* enemies, by whom they were styled “Nazarenes” (Ac 24:5), but with the *heathen* in Antioch, and (as the form of the word shows) with the *Romans*, not the *Greeks* there [OLSHAUSEN]. It was not at first used in a good sense (as Ac 26:28; 1Pe 4:16 show), though hardly framed out of contempt (as DE WETTE, BAUMGARTEN, &c.); but as it was a noble testimony to the light in which the

Church regarded Christ—honoring Him as their only Lord and Saviour, dwelling continually on His name, and glorying in it—so it was felt to be too apposite and beautiful to be allowed to die.²⁵

Acts 11:26

And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.

Probably on an evangelistic tour.

On his previous trip from Caesarea to Tarsus he appears to have taken the land route through Syria and Cilicia (9:30). Afterwards sent with Judas, Silas, and Barnabas with the letter from the Council of Jerusalem (25:23) “unto the brethren of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia...”

[Christians] The name means Christlike. Regardless of who started it the name has remained as the best one for followers of Christ. Its use indicates that the Holy Spirit considers it the highest name human beings can bear upon earth (Acts 11:26; Acts 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16).

“Christians”: Greek word with a Latin termination...no longer a sect of Hebraism. Might have started in a derogative way.

“If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed” (1 Pet 4:16).

BBC: “Christians” occurs in the New Testament only here, as a nickname given by outsiders, and in 1 Peter 4:16, as something like a legal charge. The title is formed on the analogy of adherents to a political party: the “Caesarians,” the “Herodians,” the “Pompeianians” and so forth. Antiochans were known for making fun of people, but Christians in the second century decided to adopt the title with pride. No one would have guessed how long the name would last!

Clarke: He brought him unto Antioch—As this city was the metropolis of Syria, and the third city for importance in the whole Roman empire, Rome and Alexandria alone being more eminent, Barnabas might think it expedient to have for his assistance a person of such eminent talents as Saul; and who was especially appointed by Christ to proclaim the Gospel to the Gentiles. Saul appears also to have been a thorough master of the Greek tongue, and, consequently, the better qualified to explain the Gospel to the Greek philosophers, and to defend it against their cavils. Barnabas, also being a native of Cyprus, Acts 4:36, where the Greek language was spoken, was judged to be proper for this mission, perhaps on this account, as well as on account of his disinterestedness, holiness, and zeal.

²⁵Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. On spine: Critical and explanatory commentary. (Ac 11:25). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

Clarke: And the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch—It is evident they had the name Christians from CHRIST their master; as the Platonists and Pythagoreans had their name from their masters, Plato and Pythagoras. Now, as these had their name from those great masters because they attended their teaching, and credited their doctrines, so the disciples were called Christians because they took Christ for their teacher, crediting his doctrines, and following the rule of life laid down by him. It has been a question, by whom was this name given to the disciples? Some think they assumed it; others, that the inhabitants of Antioch gave it to them; and others, that it was given by Saul and Barnabas. This later opinion is favored by the Codex Bezae, which reads the 25th and 26th verses thus: And hearing that Saul was at Tarsus, he departed, seeking for him; and having found him, he besought him to come to Antioch; who, when they were come, assembled with the Church a whole year, and instructed a great number; and there they first called the disciples at Antioch Christians.

The young church at Antioch was a curious mixture of Jews (who spoke Greek or Aramaic) and Gentiles. It is significant that this is the first place where the believers were called Christians (or “Christ-ones”), because all they had in common was Christ—not race, culture, or even language. Christ can cross all boundaries and unify all people.

Barnabas and Saul stayed at Antioch for a full year, teaching the new believers. They could have left for other cities, but they saw the importance of follow-through and training. Have you helped someone believe in God? Spend time teaching and encouraging that person. Are you a new believer? Remember, you are just beginning your Christian life. Your faith needs to grow and mature through consistent Bible study and teaching.

McGee: Barnabas had to go find Saul and bring him with him. I detect in this that Saul was a little reluctant to come. He held back.

It was here that believers in the Lord Jesus Christ were first called “Christians.” I do not think this was a term of ridicule. I think it simply meant that these were the ones who were the followers of Christ, they were *Christians*. It is an excellent name.²⁶

Spurgeon: They were named not after the word Jesus, for we cannot be joint saviors with him, but after Christ, the Anointed, for we also are anointed with the Holy Spirit.

They are called Christians (11:26)

During the time of church expansion at Antioch, outsiders begin to call the disciples by the term "Christian" (11:26). In the Greek noun form it is *Cristianoi*. This is a way of verbally identifying a follower of a group. For example, those of the party of Herod are *Herodianoi*. The *Caesariani* are those who belong to the party of Caesar. Members of one of the major Jewish religious sects are the *Pharisaioi*.

"Christian" is not a term the disciples generally use for themselves. They prefer such names as "brothers," "disciples," or "saints." The two other occurrences of the word

²⁶McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:561). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

"Christian" in the Bible are references to the church made by outsiders such as Agrippa (Acts 26:28) and persecutors in general (1 Peter 4:16). "It appears to have originated, therefore, as a somewhat slighting designation given not by the 'believers' themselves but by hostile observers (see also Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44)" (Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, page 205).

The use of the name "Christian" by outsiders may indicate that people in Antioch realize that the church is not just another sect of Judaism—it includes Gentiles as well. This realization is risky to the church. As long as it is seen as another variant of Judaism, the church is better able to obtain protection from Rome as a *religio licita*—a legal religion. Judaism has long enjoyed such protection, and it would be helpful for the church to continue to claim that umbrella for itself.

Of course, there is a continuity between Judaism and the church. Both believe in the one God of Israel; both claim the same Holy Scriptures; both espouse a similar moral code. (Even today we speak of the "Judeo-Christian" ethic.) The decisive difference, of course, is that the church places its faith in Jesus Christ as the Messiah and the author of salvation. Outsiders would see a practical difference, too: Jews tended to keep to themselves, whereas the Christians were eating with Gentiles (Galatians 2:12).²⁷

Acts 11:27

And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch.

[prophets] Prophets were those who spoke for God (Hebrews 1:1; Acts 3:21). They were primarily preachers of righteousness (Acts 15:32; 1 Cor. 14:3), but sometimes foretold the future (Acts 11:28; Acts 21:10; Luke 24:44). Prophecy was one of the gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:4-11,28) and those who had and exercised this gift were prophets (Ephes. 4:11; Acts 11:27; Acts 13:1). Directions for the exercise of this gift are found in 1 Cor. 14. The office was next in importance to apostles (Ephes. 4:11; 1 Cor. 12:28). See 1 Samuel 19:20; 2 Chron. 9:29.

BBC: That the movement had a number of prophets would impress those outside the movement; few if any movements had many prophets acting together, although Greek oracles still operated at cultic centers (less popular than in the past), and Josephus said that many Essenes could prophesy. Syria was known for its oracles, so Antiochans are probably also impressed by Christian prophets.

Some commentators have pointed out that these were traveling prophets and compared them to wandering Cynic philosophers; but given the frequent mobility of many other people in Greco-Roman antiquity, their mobility need not be related to their office. Most prophets were probably relatively stationary (1 Cor. 14:29).

Clarke: Came prophets from Jerusalem—Though the term prophet is used in the New Testament simply to signify a teacher, (see the note on Genesis 20:7, where the subject is largely explained), yet here it evidently means also such as are under Divine inspiration, and foretold future events. This was certainly the case with Agabus, Acts 11:28, though,

²⁷ <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts11.htm>

perhaps, his ordinary character was that of a teacher or preacher. It seems from various scriptures, Romans 12:4, etc., 1 Corinthians 13:2-14:40, that the prophets of the New Testament were

1. Teachers or preachers in general.
2. Persons who, on special occasions, were under the influence of the Divine Spirit, and then foretold certain future events.
3. Persons who recited hymns to the honor of God in the public assemblies of the Christians.
4. Persons who prayed in those assemblies, having sometimes the gift of tongues, at other times not.

From Ephesians 2:20; 3:5, we learn that the prophets of the Christian Church were inferior to the apostles; but, from Ephesians 4:11, we see that they were superior to all other teachers, even to evangelists and pastors.

Barnes: Came prophets. The word prophet denotes, properly, one who foretells future events. Matthew 7:16. It is sometimes used in the New Testament to denote simply *religious teachers, instructors sent from God*, without particular reference to future events. To teach the people in the doctrines of religion was a part of the prophetic office; and this idea only was sometimes denoted by the use of the word. See Romans 12:6, 1 Corinthians 12:10,28, 13:2,8, 14:3,5,24. These *prophets* seem to have been endowed in a remarkable manner with the knowledge of future events; with the power of explaining mysteries; and in some cases with the power of speaking foreign languages. In this case, it seems that one of them at least had the power of foretelling future events.

LAN: 27-28 Prophets were found not only in the Old Testament, but also in the early church. Their role was to present God's will to the people and to instruct them in God's Word. Sometimes, like Agabus, they also had the gift of predicting the future.

Acts 11:28

And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar.

Four specific local famines under Claudius:

1. 1st & 2nd years, at Rome
2. 4th year, in Judea
3. 9th year, in Greece
4. 11th year, in Rome

[**Agabus**] Mentioned twice (Acts 11:28; Acts 21:10). This man is mentioned but in one other place in the New Testament. In Acts 21:10,11, he is mentioned as having foretold that Paul would be delivered into the hands of the Gentiles. It is not expressly said that he was a Christian, but the connection seems to imply that he was.

[great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar] The 7th New Testament prophecy in Acts (Acts 11:28). Next, [□]Acts 13:11. This drought must be understood to refer to Judea. The disciples so understood it in Acts 11:29-30, for no preparations were made for themselves in Antioch or other parts of the world. If there had been a drought in other places why send relief only to Judea? A famine in the fourth year of Claudius Caesar (fourth Roman Emperor) particularly affected Judea (Josephus, Antiquities, Book 20:2:5). The word "world" is used in a limited sense.

BBC: A series of famines devastated Mediterranean agriculture in the time of Claudius: papyri show high grain prices around A.D. 46; a grain shortage in Rome nearly led to Claudius's being mobbed in the streets (about A.D. 51); Queen Helena of Adiabene bought Egyptian grain "for large sums" (due to famine there) to help Judea (about 45-46). Some commentators have connected this prophecy with the image of an end-time famine common in apocalyptic texts; although that suggestion is possible, this prophecy was fulfilled in the reign of Claudius.

Agabus—This prophet, of whom we know nothing, is once more mentioned, Acts 21:10. He was probably a Jew, but whether converted now to Christianity we cannot tell.

Barnes: In the days of Claudius Caesar. The Roman emperor. He began his reign A.D. 41, and reigned thirteen years. He was at last poisoned by one of his wives, Agrippina, who wished to raise her son Nero to the throne. During his reign no less than *four* different famines are mentioned by ancient writers, one of which was particularly severe in Judea, and was the one doubtless to which the sacred writer here refers.

(1.) The first happened at Rome, and occurred in the first or second year of the reign of Claudius. It arose from the difficulties of importing provisions from abroad. It is mentioned by Dio, whose words are these: "There being a great famine, he (Claudius) not only took care for a present supply, but provided also for the time to come." He then proceeds to state the great expense which Claudius was at in making a good port at the mouth of the Tiber, and a convenient passage from thence up to the city.—Dio, lib. Ix. pp. 671, 672. See also Suetonius, Claud. cap. 20.

(2.) A second famine is mentioned as having been particularly severe in Greece. Of this famine Eusebius speaks in his Chronicon, p. 204: "There was a great famine in Greece, in which a modius of wheat (about half a bushel) was sold for six drachms." This famine is said by Eusebius to have occurred in the ninth year of the reign of Claudius.

(3.) In the latter part of his reign, A. D. 151, there was another famine at Rome, mentioned by Suetonius, (Claud. cap. 18,) and by Tacitus, (Ann. xii. 43.) Of this Tacitus says, that "it was so severe, that it was deemed to be a Divine judgment."

(4.) A *fourth* famine is mentioned as having occurred particularly in Judea. This is described by Josephus, (Ant. b. xx. chap. 2, _ 5.) "A famine," says he, "did oppress them at the time, (in the time of Claudius ;) and many people died for the want of what was necessary to procure food withal. Queen Helena sent some of her servants to Alexandria with money to buy a great quantity of corn, and others of them to Cyprus to bring a cargo of dried figs." This famine is described as having continued under the two procurators of Judea—Tiberius Alexander, and Cassius Fadus. Fadus was sent into Judea on the death of

Agrippa, about the fourth year of the reign of Claudius; and the famine, therefore, continued probably during the fifth, sixth, and seventh years of the reign of Claudius. See Note in Whiston's Josephus, Ant. b. xx. chap. 2, _ 5; also Lardner as quoted above. Of this famine, or the want consequent on the famine, repeated mention is made in the New Testament.

LAN: 28-29 There were serious food shortages during the reign of the Roman emperor Claudius (A.D. 41-54) because of a drought that had extended across much of the Roman empire for many years. It is significant that the church in Antioch assisted the church in Jerusalem. The daughter church had grown enough to be able to help the established church.

Acts 11:29

Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea:

First spontaneous gatherings of voluntary relief for their brethren in Judea.

Clarke: Then the disciples—determined to send relief—These were probably Gentile converts; and as they considered themselves receiving the spiritual blessings, which they now so happily enjoyed, through the means of the Christians in Judea, they resolved to communicate to them a portion of their temporal goods; and every man did this according to his ability, i.e. he gave a certain proportion of the property with which the providence of God had entrusted him. The community of goods had for some time ceased.

The people of Antioch were motivated to give generously because they cared about the needs of others. This is the “cheerful” giving that the Bible commends (2 Cor. 9:7). Reluctant giving reflects a lack of concern for people. Focus your concern on the needy, and you will be motivated to give.

Acts 11:30

Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

Saul assists Barnabas for at least 1 year.

[elders] These were the leaders of the church at Jerusalem (Acts 11:1; Acts 12:1-2; Galatians 3:9).

Elders were appointed to manage the affairs of the congregation. At this point, not much is known about their responsibilities, but it appears that their main role was to respond to the believers’ needs.

BBC: Most Jewish relief efforts were local except in severe cases, for instance, when Queen Helena helped famine-stricken Palestinian Jews. But this local focus was due

more to the nature of the Roman Empire—where multiprovincial organizations were suspect—than to the nature of Judaism; cf. comment on "2 Cor. 8-9. What is significant here is that the believers act in advance of the famine through faith in the prophecy (cf. Genesis 41:33-36).

McGee: The incident that is recorded here is also verified in secular history. There was a general famine, but the effect was especially felt in Jerusalem where the church had been persecuted, decimated, and hurt. They were in dire need during this time. It is wonderful to see the fraternal spirit, the bond of love, that held the early church together. The other believers sent help to the troubled church in Jerusalem.

We remember that Saul had been one of those who had wasted the church in Jerusalem by his relentless persecution of them. How wonderful it is to see that by his own hands a transformed Saul now brings *relief* to that same church. That is Christianity in shoe leather, my friend. That is the way it ought to be

Clarke: And sent it to the elders—These probably mean those who first believed on Christ crucified, either of the seventy disciples mentioned Luke, Luke 10:1, or the one hundred and twenty mentioned, Acts 1:15, or the seven deacons, Acts 6:5. Some have divided the primitive disciples into three classes:

1. Those who were eye witnesses.
 2. Those who were the first fruits, or converts of the apostles' preaching.
 3. Those who were the successors of the preceding from whom they had received the doctrines of the Gospel. It is likely the deacons are meant, whose office it was to take care of the poor. See Acts 6:1, etc.
-
1. Among many highly interesting subjects which have come under review in the preceding chapter, we must have particularly noticed. The care the Church of Christ took to have young converts confirmed in the truths they had received, and built up on their most holy faith, Acts 11:22. It was indispensably necessary that a foundation should be laid; and it was not less so that a proper superstructure should be raised. For this work, it was requisite that different gifts and talents should be employed, and Barnabas and Saul must be sent to confirm in the faith those whom the disciples, who had been scattered by the persecution raised about Stephen, had converted to Christ, Acts 11:19-22. It is a great thing to have souls converted to the Lord; it is greater to have them built up on their most holy faith; and few persons, even among the ministers of Christ, have talents for both. Even when Paul planted, it required Apollos to water. A frequent interchange of godly ministers in the Church of Christ is of the utmost consequence to its stability and increase.
 2. It appears that CHRISTIANS was the first general appellative of the followers of our blessed Lord; and there is presumptive evidence, as we have seen, that this appellative came by Divine appointment. How very few of those who profess this religion are satisfied with this title! That very Church that arrogates all to itself has totally abandoned this title, and its members call themselves Roman Catholics, which is absurd; because the adjective and substantive include opposite ideas: catholic signifies universal; and Roman signifies of or belonging to Rome. If it be

merely Roman, it cannot be catholic; if it be catholic, it cannot be confined to Rome; but it is not catholic nor universal, in any sense of the word, for it contains but a small part of the people who profess Christianity. The term Protestant has more common sense in it; but not much more piety. Almost all sects and parties proceed in the same line; but Christian is a title seldom heard of, and the spirit and practice of Christianity but rarely occur. When all return to the spirit of the Gospel, they will probably resume the appellation of Christians.

3. An early fruit of Christianity was mercy to the poor; and especially to the poor followers of Christ. He has left the poor ever with us, as his representatives, to exercise our bowels of commiseration, and thus teach us to feel and practice mercy. To every man professing Christianity, the religion of Jesus Christ says most authoritatively, With every man who is pinched by poverty, share what the providence of God has not made absolutely necessary for thy own support. What God has given us more than we need is entrusted to us for the benefit of those that are in poverty and affliction. He who can, and does not, help the poor, is a disgrace to Christianity; and he who does not lend his hand for the support of the cause of God is a worthless member of the Church of Christ. He who shows no mercy shall have judgment without mercy. And he who spends in pampering the flesh what should be given to the poor shall have a fearful account to give in the day of the Lord.

Barnes: Sent it to the elders. Greek, To the presbyters. This is the first mention which we have in the New Testament of *elders*, or *presbyters*, in the Christian church. The word literally denotes *aged men*, but it was a name of office only in the Jewish synagogue. It is clear, however, I think, that the elders of the Jewish synagogue here are not included, for the relief was intended for the "brethren," Acts 11:29 that is, the Christians who were at Jerusalem, and it is not probable that a charity like this would have been entrusted to the hands of Jewish elders. The connection here does not enable us to determine anything about the sense in which the word was used. I think it probable that it does not refer to *officers* in the church, but that it means simply that the charity was entrusted to the *aged*, prudent, and experienced men in the church, for distribution among the members. Calvin supposes that the apostles were particularly intended. But this is not probable. It is possible that the *deacons*, who were probably aged men, may be here particularly referred to; but I am rather inclined to think that the charity was sent to the aged members of the church without respect to their office, to be distributed according to their discretion.

Summary Comments

Continuity:

- Stephen's martyrdom spreads efforts;
- Peter's vision = church's eyesight;
- Saul's apprehension = Antioch's supply.

Absolute freedom, independent actions

- Men of Cyprus, Cyrene preach to Greeks;
- Sending of Barnabas by apostles;
- Finding of Saul by Barnabas;
- Collection for Judea = spontaneous.

Unity

- "One Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is in all, and through all" (Eph 4:5,6).

Perpetual variety

- Apostolic gift, evangelistic gifts, prophetic gifts, and the pastoral gifts (Cf. Eph 4:11).
- No one man can win a soul.