

## **Acts Part 1 Study Guide**

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### **Lesson 10: Peter's Defense and the Church in Antioch – Acts 11**

**Introduction:** The reaction to Peter's trip to Caesarea by those in Jerusalem gives some perspective on the depth of prejudice between Jew and Gentile. It took divine intervention to persuade Peter to go, and it will take a clear and orderly explanation of the events to convince the other Jewish believers to accept what has occurred.

#### **1. Peter's Defense – Acts 11:1-18**

- A. News travels fast, even in the pre-satellite/cell phone days. The other apostles and brethren in Judea are alarmed at the news of Peter's actions, and they call upon him to explain himself upon his return – 11:1-3.
- B. Even as Peter had been persuaded by divine instruction in the matter, so he recounts the events in the hope that their minds, too, might be changed – 11:4-17.
  - 1. The six witnesses who accompanied Peter to Caesarea are there – 11:12.
  - 2. Peter recalls the divine intervention on both his and Cornelius' behalf – 11:5-14.
  - 3. The clincher, however, is the coming of the Holy Spirit upon uncircumcised believers – 11:15-17. Note carefully the terminology involved:
    - a. The Holy Spirit "fell upon them" – 11:15. No imposition of apostles' hands as in the case of the seven servants (chap. 6) or the Samaritans (chap. 8). This was a unique event.
    - b. Peter equates it with "as upon us at the beginning" – 11:15. Again, he goes all the way back to Pentecost, a number of years earlier, to find a precedent. Obviously, the action that happened at Cornelius' house was not commonplace; it did not accompany "normal" conversion.
    - c. The event causes Peter to remember the Lord's instructions about being "baptized with the Holy Spirit" – 11:16. This happened "at the beginning."
    - d. Peter styles the Spirit's influence upon Cornelius as "the same gift" that was given to the apostles by virtue of their belief in Christ.
    - e. The logical conclusion: "*Who was I that I could withstand God?*" – 11:17. Indeed, through this process God gradually revealed to Peter the truth about His acceptance of the Gentiles. Peter properly evaluated the evidence.
- C. Peter's testimony is convincing, and thus we see the convicting and educating power of truth upon good hearts – 11:18.

#### **2. The Beginning of the Church in Antioch – Acts 11:19-26**

**Note:** The chapter division surely would have been better placed here, for Luke now

recounts a major phase of early kingdom development. As Jerusalem became the center of activity in the early stage of preaching among the Jews, so Antioch becomes a focal point of preaching among the Gentiles.

- A. The seed planted – 11:19-21. Luke returns to the story line begun in chapter 8. The scattered disciples, not merely the apostles, took the gospel with them in their flight from Judea. Initially preaching was limited to the Jews, but the conversion of Cornelius opens the door to Gentiles as well. (**Note:** In older manuscripts the term “Hellenists” (11:20) is from the Gk. *hellenas*, whereas the term “Hellenists” in 6:1 is *hellenistas*. The difference is that 6:1 refers to Greek-influenced Jews and 1:20 refers to pure Gentiles. The intervening chapters make it clear that there was no conversion of Gentiles until Cornelius.)
- B. The seed watered – 11:22-26a. Barnabas, introduced in Ac 4:36 and 9:27, now resurfaces as a major character in the expansion of the kingdom. The apostles have confidence in him to see about the events they heard are transpiring in Antioch. Paul, who has also been out of the picture since 9:30, reappears to work closely with Barnabas in teaching in this new and different kind of congregation: a mix of Jews and Gentiles.
- C. A change of designation – 11:26b. Believers, mostly referred to thus far by Luke as disciples, brethren or the church, are now styled “Christians.” The new, ethnically diverse makeup of the Antioch church calls for a new designation.

### **3. Gentile → Jew Benevolence – Acts 11:27-30**

In anticipation of broader issues to come, Luke includes an episode of Gentiles sending financial assistance to Jews in Judea. A famine in the reign of Claudius (AD 41-54) creates a hardship upon the brethren, and the church at Antioch responds with sympathy and magnanimity. Note that the first elders are mentioned by Luke.

#### **Questions:**

1. Compare Acts 11:18 and Acts 5:31. How is repentance “given” by God?
2. How did God grant repentance to the “Gentiles” when only Cornelius and his associates became Christians?
3. Describe the growth of the gospel in Antioch.
4. Put together a character sketch of Barnabas from what is said about him thus far.
5. Do you think Acts 11:29 is a “church contribution”? Explain.