

- A Study in Acts -

**Chapter Eleven – Peter's Explanation – First Called Christians**

**ACTS 11:19-30:**

In our previous lesson, we concluded with Peter defending himself for going in among the Gentiles. In addition, because of the wisdom of God and the demonstration of His approval of the actions of Peter on behalf of the Gospel to the Gentiles, the universal outcome was, "**Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance of life**" - **Acts 11:18**.

In this lesson, we will note that Luke returns the focus on Saul (who is also called Paul – **13:9**); and Barnabas who will go to Tarsus to retrieve him (just briefly until the close of this **chapter**, and then return back to Peter in **chapter twelve**).

**Text #1:**

**Acts 11:19-21** “Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only. <sup>20</sup> But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus. <sup>21</sup> And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.”

**Those who were Scattered:** This statement returns us back to **Chapter 8:4**, which we will call a hub verse. This is since although much has transpired between **8:4** and now (Philipp’s work, Saul’s conversion, Peter’s work in the coastal plain), very little time has transpired. As the Jews who have obeyed the Gospel of Jesus as the Christ have faced persecution by their countrymen (**1 Thessalonians 2:13-16**), they have now begun to return home (from **chapter 8:4** to now, has transpired during approximately 40-41 AD).

Keep in mind that they have remained in Jerusalem for much longer than normal in order to receive the instruction of the Apostles (**2:42**); literally becoming a prepared people for a prepared work, the spread of the Gospel (living it, and sharing it).

**Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch:** Here listed by Luke are the primary locations that the majority returning would spend their time. Phoenicia is the coastal region far north of Judea with its two major cities of Tyre and Sidon. Cyprus was the isle off the coast of Phoenicia and directly west in the Mediterranean. Antioch was a large city far to the north of both Judea and even Phoenicia in the Roman province of Syria.

**Bringing the Word to Jews Only:** Even though Peter has breached the threshold bringing the Gospel to the Gentiles, we see the wisdom of the Lord to fulfill His word to the Jews that the Gospel would come to them first to give them the chance to be the builders that they were intended to be (**Psalms 118:22; Acts 4:11; Romans 1:16**).

**Come to Antioch:** Antioch was a large and beautiful city about 16 miles from the sea on a navigable river. It was called the “*Queen of the East*” the “*Third metropolis of the world*”. Men from Cyprus and Cyrene (and area west of Egypt by what we know as Libya today) came to

Antioch and spoke to the Hellenists. Hellenists were Greek speaking Jews; and it was in Greek that these preached the Lord (Ruler) Jesus. A great number **“believed and turned”**.

This is a description of the act of conversion. In **Acts 2:37-38**; it was cut to the heart (acknowledged understanding and godly sorrow – belief), repent, and be baptized. In **Acts 3:19**; it was repent and turn (converted). In **Acts 5:14**; it was **“believers were increasing added to the Lord”**. In **Acts 8:12-13**; it was Samaritans and Simon the Sorcerer that believed and were baptized. In **Acts 8:36-37**; it was the Ethiopian eunuch who **“if”** he believed he could be baptized. In **Acts 9:18**; it was Saul who believed in the Lord who appeared to him and was baptized. In **Acts 10:48**; it was Cornelius and his household who, believing the preaching of Peter, were commanded to be baptized.

#### **Text #2:**

**Acts 11:22-26** **“Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch. <sup>23</sup> When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord. <sup>24</sup> For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord.**

**<sup>25</sup> Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. <sup>26</sup> And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.”**

**Barnabas:** Barnabas was selected and sent to work with the brethren that now exist in Antioch of Syria. It should not surprise us that Barnabas was chosen to go to them to encourage them; this was his unique designation, note:

**Acts 4:36** **“And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus”**

**Purpose of Heart:** What a great phrase of encouragement for all of us. To literally develop a resolute heart to continue with the Lord. To know that salvation has come from God through Jesus Christ and to take hold of it with no intention of ever letting go (see: **Philippians 2:12**).

**Saul:** We left Saul at Tarsus – **Chap. 9:30**. Now Barnabas retrieves him to come and work with him at Antioch for a year.

**First Called Christians:** This is the first of only three times that this term is recorded as a description of those who have obeyed the Gospel (the other two are: **Acts 26:28**; and **1 Peter 4:16**). The term Christian simply means *“pertaining to Christ”*. Here is a brief list of references that in just the short time we have engaged in the study of Acts that “Christians” have also been referred as:

- Those being saved – **Acts 2:47**.
- Those who believed – **Acts 4:32**.

- The Church (Greek, ‘*ekklesia*’ – “the called out”, not the Greek ‘*kuriakos*’ – “belonging to the Lord”; which is where we derive the English word church) – **Acts 5:11; 8:1, 3; 9:31.**
- Believers – **Acts 5:14.**
- Disciples (learners and practitioners) – **Acts 6:1-2, 7; 9:25-26, 36.**
- The way – **Acts 9:2.**
- Brethren – **Acts 9:30; 11:1.**
- Saints – **9:41.**

This is also a fulfillment of a prophecy we find in **Isaiah 62:2; 65:15**; concerning the coming of a new name in the reign of the Great Servant of God and the salvation of spiritual Zion.

**Text #3:**

**Acts 11:27-30** “And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. <sup>28</sup> Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar. <sup>29</sup> Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. <sup>30</sup> This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.”

**Agabus:** He is a prophet of God under the reign of Christ the Lord, from Jerusalem (prophets are mouth pieces for God, speaking things previously unknown; whether past, present, or future), speaking of a famine throughout the world. We will hear from this prophet of God again in **Acts 21:10.**

**Send Relief:** Here is another approved example of benevolence that we should take notice of. Just as in similar instances of benevolence engaged by the collective (the Body of Christ – **Acts 2, 4, 6**), it was to be collected and sent on behalf of needy “**brethren**” in Judea. The Body of Christ is equipped and charged to perform locally everything that the Lord has charged the Body to accomplish (**Ephesians 4:12**); “**Perfecting the Saints**” – which is the instruction and education process for proper Christian living; “**Work of the ministry**” - i.e., benevolence; and “**Edifying itself in love**” – the enlarging of the borders of the kingdom. This example of the Body of Christ in Antioch falls well within the guidelines established by the Lord for His body. In addition, this benevolent collection was to be rendered to the elders of the Body of Christ in the specific Bodies of Christ for oversight and proper distribution to the truly needy, avoiding the calamity of **Chapter 6.**

To this simple understanding, the Lord never intended for the Body of Christ to be a social welfare institution apart from the needy saints (which emphasizes the Gospel to the world over food for the world). Individually, Christians may and should help our neighbors to the best of our ability; however, making sure that we never enable evil in their lives (**Romans 12:9**); instead demonstrating that God is sanctified in our hearts so that we might answer to them when they ask us of the hope that is in us – **1 Peter 3:15.**

This constitutes an approved example, given to establish the boundaries of authority for that which the Body of Christ should be engaged in according to its head.