

## ***The Church of the Servant King***

[www.cotsk.org](http://www.cotsk.org)

### ***Survey of the Bible Series – The Book of Acts***

(SB\_Acts11\_Peter Reports Back to Jerusalem & Barnabas in Antioch)

#### **Peter Reports to Jerusalem (11:1-18)**

##### *The Setting and the Question from the Jewish Believers (11:1-3)*

It should be fairly obvious that Luke uses the phraseology “they of the circumcision” to refer to Jewish believers in distinction from Gentile believers (cf. 10:45). It is also obvious that there were no uncircumcised believers in Jerusalem; otherwise, the question regarding Peter’s actions would have been rather pointless. (Were there perhaps uncircumcised proselytes to Judaism located in Jerusalem? Yes, as noted in the prior lessons. However, our passage is dealing with new converts to faith in the resurrected Jesus as the Messiah – not converts to historic Judaism).

Of course, at this point during the waning days of the historic Age of Israel as the transition to the Age of the Body of Christ was underway, the issue of compliance with the Mosaic Law was a significant issue. While the fulfillment of the requirements of the Law was a fact accomplished by Jesus in His death, Jewish believers continued to struggle with the question of whether the requirements of the Law were still to be observed. This is evident in our passage and was an issue with which Paul contended in the epistle to the Galatians. The writer to the Hebrews alludes to this issue also. The question – was a Jew or Gentile believer in Jesus as the promised Messiah who accomplished reconciliation in fulfillment of Hebrew prophecy required to comply with the rite of circumcision, or any other requirement of the Law for that matter?

Of course, Paul later builds on this issue as he distinguishes true circumcision of the spiritual heart through faith and physical ritual that could even be practiced by those without faith, i.e. unbelievers. See the following passages.

For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. (Phil 3:3)

In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it. (Col 2:11-15)

##### *Peter’s Explanation (11:4-17)*

Peter recounts the events recorded in chapter 10. In doing so, Peter states as clearly as he could that the same thing that had happened to the believing Jews and Jewish proselytes at Pentecost happened to Cornelius and those other Gentile believers present at Cornelius’ house. On the subject of whether the baptism of the Spirit that is observed here and in association with Pentecost began a new dispensation in an unrecognized manner, I quote from Charles F. Baker.

If “Christ baptizing with the Spirit” is identical with “the Holy Spirit baptizing believers into the Body of Christ,” then the Jews at Pentecost and Cornelius were all made members of the Body of Christ, for they all had the same experience. But if these two baptisms are separate and distinct, then neither Cornelius or those at Pentecost were baptized into the Body of Christ, for neither is said to have been baptized by the Spirit into the Body. We do not believe that the baptism which bestows the miraculous gifts of tongues, healing, and prophecy is that which unites believers today as members of the Body. The one is outward, observed, and experiential. The other is inward, unobserved, and not experienced by the senses. Much confusion among Christians over Spirit Baptism would be cleared away if these distinctions were observed. It may be claimed that Peter supposed that God was doing the same thing for Cornelius that He did for the Jews at Pentecost, but secretly He was doing something entirely new and different. But of course, the same thing may be said of what happened at Pentecost: that is, the apostles supposed that Joel’s prophecy was being fulfilled, but secretly God was beginning an entirely new dispensation. This seems to us to be reading something into the Scripture and to be throwing discredit upon the words of men who were filled with the Holy Spirit.<sup>1</sup>

#### *The Response of the Jewish Believers (11:18)*

The Jewish believers in Jerusalem were elated over Peter’s message. They received the message of the conversion of Gentiles with joy. These Jerusalem believers did not demonstrate any attitude of self-righteousness at this time.

#### **Barnabas and Saul at Antioch (11:19-26)**

#### *Evangelism in Antioch (11:19-21)*

The scattering of the Jewish believers took place approximately ten years prior to the events of our chapter. In Acts 8:4, we are informed that those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word, but here we get additional details. They taught none but the Jews only. So, with the few exceptions noted to date (e.g. the Ethiopian eunuch and Cornelius), none but Jews were evangelized. We could even be more specific and state that none but Jews were pursued evangelistically and only those Gentiles who were aggressively seeking the Truth were evangelized too – almost unintentionally by the early believers. As far as recorded Scripture is concerned, Peter is the first to have preached to a Gentile apart from a Jewish setting.

---

<sup>1</sup> Charles F. Baker, *Understanding the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Grace Bible College Publications, 1981), 68-69. Note that Baker recognizes some important distinctions that are essential to proper interpretation, e.g. the Biblical distinction between the baptism by Christ with the Holy Spirit and the baptism by the Holy Spirit into the Body of Christ and the distinction between what we have defined as a “type 1” versus a “type 2” filling with the Holy Spirit.



It is best to understand Luke's statements in verse 20 that "some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus" as follows. The Authorized Version interprets the "Hellenists" as Greek speaking Jews. The Revised Text interprets the "Hellenists" as "Greeks." Regardless, we know that there were Jewish people from all over the Roman Empire who were gathered in Jerusalem at the Pentecost event recorded in Acts 2. As the persecution began to arise with Stephen's martyrdom, these new Jewish believers began to return to their homes away from Jerusalem. As they did so, they evangelized Jews of the Hellenistic sort. These Hellenistic Jews were made up the original group of believers in Antioch. Later, once the news of Cornelius' conversion circulated throughout the believing community that had been scattered throughout the Roman empire, these Jewish believers of such places as Cyprus and Cyrene returned to Antioch to evangelize the large number of Gentiles located there.

Seleucus I founded the city of Antioch, naming it after his father. The city was cosmopolitan, attracting people of various cultures and ethnic backgrounds – including people from Persia, India, and even China. The gospel proclaimed in Antioch would have had tremendous potential for reaching other areas of the world. Moreover, because the city was culturally diverse, it was not controlled by one religious group, making the people there more open to hearing the truth of the gospel message.<sup>2</sup>

*The Believers at Jerusalem Send Barnabas to Investigate (11:22-24)*

Barnabas, whose nickname among the apostles, was "son of encouragement" (Acts 4:36) was sent by the Jerusalem church to investigate the events at Antioch. Evidently, led of the Holy Spirit, Barnabas brought Saul from Tarsus to Antioch. They both remained for a year and encouraged the new believers by teaching them Truth.

*Barnabas and Saul Teach Believers in Antioch for One Year (11:25-26)*

---

<sup>2</sup> Earl D. Radmacher, gen editor, *The Nelson Study Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997), 1840.

The word or name “Christian” is only mentioned here and in two other verses in the Bible – Acts 26:28 and 1 Peter 4:16). There is a lot of speculation regarding the origin of the name “Christian.” The name was most likely applied to believers as a term of derision or ridicule. Note that in our passage and context, there is no connection between this term and the Body of Christ of which Paul later speaks. “Christians” in our passage are simply believers in Jesus as the Messiah in fulfillment of Scripture.

The historian Josephus called them “that tribe of Christians.” Tacitus, the Roman historian, referred to them as “Christians, a name derived from Christ.” Originally, the church called themselves “The Way.” But later they began to refer to themselves as Christians, despite the fact that the name most likely was originally used to ridicule the believers.<sup>3</sup>

### **Relief Sent to Judea from Antioch (11:27-30)**

Agabus, who had the spiritual gift of prophecy, prophesied that a famine would spread throughout the region. Agabus is mentioned again in Acts 21:10. In actuality, there were several famines that spread throughout the region during the reign of Claudius Caesar (A.D. 41-54). This same emperor later expelled Jews from Rome (Acts 18:2) – an action consistent with the actions of governments throughout history who looked for a scapegoat to receive the blame for their problems. The believers at Antioch, many of whom were Gentile, sent monetary relief to the believers in Jerusalem and sent the donation with Saul and Barnabas. This is Saul’s second visit to Jerusalem after his conversion. The famine visit in our passage by Saul is probably the one referred to by Paul in Galatians 2:1-10.

One thing that characterized Paul’s ministry was his concern for the saints who were materially poor. One thing the Jerusalem council encouraged Paul to do was to always remember the poor which Paul later acknowledges that he did (Acts 15:-35 cf. Gal 2:10).

In these verses, we also see the first mention of the “elders” in Acts. Consistent with local assembly governance during the Age of Israel, elders had oversight of the financial and spiritual well being of those who were affiliated with their assembly. The concept of “elder” is a Jewish-centric concept that can be traced back to the days of Moses. These men were recognized and trusted for their wisdom and sound judgment. There is no specific model of polity for the local assembly of believers within the present age. Nevertheless, the concept that underlies the position of elders during the Age of Israel should be considered when the local assembly of believers today establishes its own polity. One expression of church governance today that carries forward the concept of an elder is the establishment of a board of wise counsel for the pastor.

---

<sup>3</sup> Radmacher, *Nelson Study Bible*, 1840.

