

## Outline

1. Peter defends going to Cornelius
  1. Peter foretold the attack (Acts 10:28)
  2. Explanation
    1. Begins with the vision (Acts 11:5)
    2. Ends with the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Acts 11:15-17)
  3. Critics silenced and disciples rejoice
2. Spread of the gospel
  1. Persecution scatters disciples to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch (of Syria)
  2. Gospel is spread to
    1. "Jews only" (Acts 11:19)
    2. "the Hellenists" (Acts 11:20)
  3. Word is received in Jerusalem
    1. Barnabus sent to go as far as Antioch
    2. When he saw, he encouraged
  4. Barnabus departs for Tarsus
    1. Brings Saul from Tarsus to Antioch
    2. Assembled for a year
    3. During this time, the name "Christian" was first applied to disciples
3. Intercongregational relief
  1. Famine foretold
  2. Disciples in Antioch decide to send aid as each had ability
  3. Aid sent
    1. By messengers (Barnabus and Saul)
    2. To the elders in Jerusalem

## Commentary

We see the beginnings of future discord in the Lord's church in Acts 11:2. Paul, for one, will spend much of his time and energy dealing with "those of the circumcision." Even Peter, himself, will get carried away in this debate (Gal. 2:11-14). This time, however, Peter patiently explains the order of things, beginning with his vision and continuing through to the conversion account.

Acts 11:14 tells us the importance of the things that Peter had to say: "words by which you and all your household will be saved."

Peter's entire point is to place these Gentiles on the same footing as the Jews. At first, he would have kept himself separate from Cornelius and those like him. But now:

1. He had been shown a vision
2. He was told by the Holy Spirit to go
3. He had seen the baptism of the Holy Spirit extended to these Gentiles

It is probable that "the Hellenists" in Acts 11:20 are Gentiles as this statement is made in opposition to the phrase "the Jews only" in Acts 11:19. Given the locations and demographics of Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, it is most logical to assume that all of "the Jews" would have been Greek-speaking Jews (or, "Hellenists" as they are termed in Acts 6:1).

Further evidence of the Hellenists being Gentile is found in the sending of Barnabus. It would not have been necessary to send him had these merely been Greek-speaking Jews. The church in Jerusalem had already seen and accepted those. For his part, Barnabus remains true to his name in giving encouragement to the conversions of these Gentiles.

We do not know what Saul has been doing between Acts 9:30 and Acts 11:25. There is much speculation concerning what he was up to, but Lenski perhaps puts it best when he says that "Here there is room for the play of the imagination" (Lenski, 456) for the "play of the imagination" is all that the Scripture provides. What we do know is that Barnabus brings

him to Antioch where they work for a year and are then sent forth to preach.

The word “Christian” is only found in three verses (Acts 11:26, 26:28, and 1 Peter 4:16). Yet, it is important to note that the use of the name is widespread and begins here in Antioch. It seems to me that this is due to the success of the Christians there in converting others.

The famine mentioned by Agabus seems most likely not to be one famine which affected all of the world, but a series of poor harvests and slow recoveries which affected different parts of the Roman Empire at different times throughout the reign of Claudius (Suetonius *Vita Claudius* 18:2; Tacitus *Annales* 12.43; Dio Cassius *History of Rome* 60.11; Orosius *History* 7.6.17). Josephus, for his part, recounts a famine in Jerusalem at around AD 46 in *The Antiquities of the Jews*:

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But as to Helena, the king’s mother, when she saw that the affairs of Izates’s kingdom were in peace, and that her son was a happy man, and admired among all men and even among foreigners, by the means of God’s providence over him, she had a mind to go to the city of Jerusalem, in order to worship at that temple of God which was so very famous among all men, and to offer her thank offerings there. So she desired her son to give her leave to go thither: upon which he gave his consent to what she desired very willingly, and made great preparations for her dismissal, and gave her a great deal of money, and she went down to the city of Jerusalem, her son conducting her on her journey a great way. Now her coming was of very great advantage to the people of Jerusalem; for whereas a famine did oppress them at that time, and many people died for 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; and as soon as they were come back, and brought those provisions, which was done very quickly, she distributed food to those that were in want of it, and left a most excellent



memorial behind her of this benefaction, which she bestowed on our whole nation; and when her son Izates was informed of this famine, he sent great sums of money to the principal men in Jerusalem. However, what favors this queen and king conferred upon our city Jerusalem, shall be further related hereafter. (*Antiquities XX:49-53*)

We see an excellent response and example when news of the coming famine is announced. The Christians in Antioch determine to send aid “each according to his ability” (Acts 11:29). That aid was sent by means of messengers and was directed to the elders. While Paul would later admonish the Corinthians to set some aside weekly (1 Cor. 16:1-2), it is most important to make two points here:

1. Each did what he was able to do. There appears to be no stigma attached to those who were unable to assist in meeting the needs of others. The expectation is that each will do what can be done, and there is no accountability for what is beyond that ability.
2. The elders in Jerusalem were given the oversight of the distribution to the needy. Saul and Barnabus may have been the emissaries of the church in Antioch, but they sent the funds to the elders. What happens beyond this we have no record concerning. It could be that the elders took care of the distribution themselves or it could be that they laid it to the charge of whatever of the men were left of those appointed to that ministry in Acts 6. We have no record of how the distribution was accomplished, only that it was first entrusted to the eldership of the Jerusalem congregation.

### **Thought Questions**

Consider the following thought questions:

1. Why does Peter begin his narrative with the vision of the sheet being let down from heaven?
2. What does Acts 11:16 indicate about what happened to Cornelius and his company in Acts 10:44-46?

3. Do you think that the story beginning in Acts 11:19 is parallel to or comes after the story in Acts 10?
4. Why would the church at Jerusalem send Barnabus (Acts 11:22) to go as far as Antioch?
5. What are the lessons for us in how relief was sent to Jerusalem?