

# Acts 11—Quality Leaders Matter

Pastor Emeritus Joe Fuiten, February 2, 2022 (02022022)  
Forty days after Christmas is the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple

**Peter was criticized for following the direction of the Lord.** *1 The apostles and the brothers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. 2 So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him 3 and said, "You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them."*

The group of apostles included Peter but in this case it must be referring to the others who were still in Jerusalem. The circumcised believers were those who were particularly attached to the law. This is still prior to Acts 15 when the matters relating to the Jewish law had still not been resolved. At this point, many in the church still believed that the Jewish law remained in effect for Jewish believers. In such a case, it would not have been lawful for Peter to eat with Gentiles.

When you know that people are critical of a certain thing, you are able to address it. In the work of the Lord, it is helpful to know what people are criticizing because often they are lacking a bit of information that would not only silence the criticism but allow them to become supporters of the church in a given matter. In this case, Peter knew about it because they told him so. That gave him a chance to inform them of what God was doing and the evidence for it.

This incident is a prelude to the controversies that would later be resolved in chapter 15.

**Peter retold the story of his vision.** *4 Peter began and explained everything to them precisely as it had happened: 5 "I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. I saw something like a large sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to where I was. 6 I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, reptiles, and birds of the air. 7 Then I heard a voice telling me, 'Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.' 8 "I replied, 'Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.' 9 "The voice spoke from heaven a second time, 'Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.' 10 This happened three times, and then it was all pulled up to heaven again. 11 "Right then three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea stopped at the house where I was staying. 12 The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered the man's house.*

In this section, Peter is rehearsing the events of chapter 10. Since we covered the original events last week, we can omit discussion of it this week.

**Peter's retold what happened in Caesarea when the first Gentiles got saved.** *13 He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, 'Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. 14 He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.' 15 "As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. 16 Then I remembered what the Lord had said: 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' 17 So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?" 18 When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, "So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life."*

This passage is important because it tells us what Peter concluded from what he saw chapter 10. We have to be careful here because we do not want to give the impression that speaking in tongues is the same thing as being saved. Peter is not careful on this subject because

he is merely describing what he saw without regard to the controversies that would emerge in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Peter has Cornelius saying that the guest speaker would bring a message of salvation. In the next sentence (verse 15) Peter describes the Holy Spirit coming upon Cornelius and his friends in the same way that he had come upon the 120 in the upper room (recorded in Acts 2). The events are telescoped together as though they are one, just as a powerful telescope might make two mountain ranges appear to rise one from the other when in reality they are separated by a great valley. As verse 17 indicates, he is really talking about the baptism with the Holy Spirit. The verse makes a clear distinction between believing in the Lord Jesus Christ and the baptism with the Holy Spirit. The gift came to those who believed in Jesus but believing in Jesus is not the baptism with the Holy Spirit.

**Antiochian Greeks were the second group of Gentiles to get saved.** *19 Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia<sup>1</sup>, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews. 20 Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene<sup>2</sup>, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. 21 The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.*

The Gospel reaching Antioch is a continuation of Luke's account of the spread of the Gospel. The Gospel reaching Caesarea and Cornelius is one part of the Gentile expansion. The arrival of the Gospel in Antioch is the second group of Gentiles to receive the Gospel.

Antioch, which was home of the Governor and the Roman capital of the province of Syria, was some 300 miles north of Jerusalem. In the first century AD, Antioch ranked behind Rome and Alexandria as the third largest city of the Roman Empire, with a population of about 300,000 "free inhabitants," probably 500,000 if slaves were counted.

Antioch was 15 miles inland from the northeast corner of the Mediterranean Sea, and was built partly on an island, partly on a levee and partly on the steep, craggy ascent of Mount Silpius, which rose abruptly on the south. It was called "Antioch on the Orontes" or "Antioch of Syria" to distinguish it from 17 other Antiochs. The city soon became the western terminus of the Silk Road which had recently opened up trade with China. Camels arrived there bearing spices, silk and other exotic goods from beyond the Himalayas. Antioch's command of north-south and east-west roads contributed greatly to its growth and prosperity.

The city was also called "Queen of the East" because of its mixed population of Romans, Persians, Indians and even Chinese. Given its religions and ethnic mix it was quite cosmopolitan and earned the reputation of being an immoral city. If the Gospel was to become a world-wide religion that included Gentiles, Antioch was the right place from which to launch it. The "revival" that took place in Antioch was a clear signal that God intended his Gospel to reach all people.

**Barnabas (and Saul) disciplined people called "Christians" at Antioch.** *22 News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. 23 When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. 24 He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord. 25 Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, 26 and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were*

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<sup>1</sup> Coastal area around Tyre, and Sidon mostly in modern day Lebanon.

<sup>2</sup> A city in what is now Libya. Today it is uninhabited.

*called Christians first at Antioch. 27 During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world.<sup>3</sup> (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) 29 The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea. 30 This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.*

In verse 24, Luke tells us that Barnabas was three things. I suspect that having all three elements in his life, not just one, was what made him a particularly attractive person.

**First, he was a good man.** What we know about Barnabas was that he was very generous and alert to the needs of people around him. Right from the start of his Christian faith, he had this attitude. Where did he get this attitude?

Barnabas was a Levite.<sup>4</sup> From that training he understood that the righteous life is expressed in concern for other people. Upon becoming a Christian, he carried those values with him into the Church. In fact, the first thing we learn about Barnabas had to do with his generous acts in helping the poor in Jerusalem. *“There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need. Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.”<sup>5</sup>*

In the Levitical system, you served from age 25 to 50. The Levites lived in 48 Israeli cities. The fact that he was from Cyprus suggests possibly two things. First, he may well have been somewhat successful to be able to live in Cyprus as well as in one of the 48 Levitical cities of Israel. Second, he might not have been the most spiritual person prior to finding Christ since he was off living in Cyprus rather than in Israel. When he did get saved, he was in Jerusalem, and he sold a piece of property that he owned somewhere, although not necessarily a piece in Cyprus.

The assignment to carry the almsgiving gift to Jerusalem was given to Barnabas and Saul. No doubt Barnabas was chosen because of the kind deeds that he had already done. If he was willing to sell his own property and give the money to the poor, he could probably be trusted to handle their money as well. I personally believe it is a spiritual principle that a person must first give their own money before they could possibly be responsible for someone else's. That is why we only nominate people for Deacon who are tithers.

You will recall our discussion in Acts 9 where Barnabas was the man who helped Saul get assimilated into the church in Jerusalem. He seems to show a similar style in how he handled the new believers in Antioch. When Barnabas arrived at Antioch he looked at those new converts and *“saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.”* Like all big cities in all eras of time, Antioch had a lot of messed up people. I can guarantee you that those people Barnabas was describing were not free of problems. New converts never are. We might add that humans never are. Barnabas

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<sup>3</sup>In what sense was the famine all over the world? In the Aramaic manuscripts “world” is “a’ra”. This is the Aramaic form of the Hebrew word “*eretz*”. The word is translated “world” in Prov. 19:4, “earth” in Dan. 2:35, and “land” in Dan. 9:15. It is often used as an expression for the land of Israel, as in Dan. 9:6. In this particular case the word is *oikoumene*. It may be that it refers, not to the world in the global sense, but in the sense of the land of Judea.

<sup>4</sup> Levites were descendants of Levi who assisted the Priests in the Tabernacle/Temple. In particular, they took care of the Temple doing menial duties and assisting the descendant of Aaron who functioned as priests. Today we might call them assistant priests.

<sup>5</sup>Acts 4:34-37.

didn't note all the warts and failures. He didn't dwell on what remained to be done. He took note of what had been done. He saw God's grace at work and he commented on it. He caught people doing things right. (He wasn't oblivious to the other, because he also immediately sent for Saul to come and start preaching, but his attitude was mainly positive.)

**Second, he was full of the Holy Spirit.** This means he was not just a do-gooder. This was a godly man. God filled his life. Because God filled his life, he acted. I believe the best of all worlds is to be both good and godly. When we do our kind acts, they should be done in the name of the Lord. I am not here to criticize the helping organizations like the Red Cross, and these other charitable organizations. On the other hand, there is no emphasis upon the "cross" in Red Cross. I think it probably started that way, but over time they have just become another humanitarian organization. I like working through the Church because of its connection to godliness. For the same reason, if government services were delivered through the Church, as they are in some other countries, it would provide a double benefit. The work would get done, but the faith would also be strengthened as well. This is why I like doing charitable work through groups like Convoy of Hope.

**Third, he was full of faith.** I think it is ok to separate the last two, even though they are kind of linked together. When Luke told us about Stephen the first martyr, he used those same two expressions to describe him. "*Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them* <sup>4</sup> *and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.*" <sup>5</sup> *This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism.* <sup>6</sup> *They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.*<sup>6</sup>

In this case, his faith was expressed in several ways. Not least of those ways was his effort to recruit Saul to come and preach at Antioch. Barnabas didn't think he was God's answer to every problem they had. He went and got Saul because he knew Saul was a good teacher and would be of great help in Antioch. He knew that if he got Saul there, good things would happen.

These three qualities of Barnabas: that he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, resulted in a great number of people coming to the Lord.

This chapter has the first of two appearances of Agabus, a prophet who accurately predicted future events. It is important to note that his predictions were accurate since many prophets today prophesy but not accurately. The famine takes place somewhere between about AD 48 where Saul and Barnabas are in Antioch and AD 54 when Claudius dies and Nero rises to power.<sup>7</sup>

As in the other case, the prophecy is so that something positive can be done to solve the problem. In this case, they take up a collection for the purchase of food in Judea. Each person contributes what they are able.

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<sup>6</sup> Acts 6:3-6.

<sup>7</sup> *The Life & Epistles of St. Paul* by Conybeare and Howson.