

The Acts of the Holy Spirit

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

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Controversy in Jerusalem, the Church in Antioch

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Peter and His Ministry to the Gentiles ([11:1-18](#))

The Gentiles had also received the word of God: The great news about the work of the Holy Spirit among the Gentiles in Caesarea couldn't help but spread. But some of the Jewish Christians ("those of the circumcision") were confused or offended at their entire notion.

"You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!" The charges against Peter are simple: "You, who are supposed to be a faithful Jew, associated with and even ate with Gentiles!" Sharing a meal together was a sign of fellowship in that culture, and this was no doubt considered to be a significant compromise and betrayal of everything they had been taught. The reaction of the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem to what Peter did, makes clear just how wise it was of Peter to take six witnesses with him to Caesarea and his meeting with Cornelius in the previous chapter.

What God has cleansed you must not call common: At first, Peter thought God was speaking about food. But Peter came to understand the vision of the sheet and kosher and unkosher animals has to do with people, not food (Acts 10:28). There is a sense in which the sheet represents the church, having both "kosher" (Jews) and "unkosher" (Gentiles) on it, with no distinction between the two.

If God was moving ministry out to the Gentiles, who is Peter that he could withstand God? Peter recognized the importance of sensing where God is going and heading that same direction, instead of trying to persuade God to go in his direction.

These Christians would realize, or start to realize, that this was all in accord with the Scriptures. They had both the word of the Lord Jesus (Mark 1:8), and the Old Testament promise that Gentiles would come to the Lord through the Messiah (e.g., Isaiah 49:6) to help bring this all together.

They became silent: The Jewish believers in Jerusalem first react with a stunned silence. But then they glorified God, because they saw He was now working among the Gentiles, too.

This is a powerful passage, demonstrating that the hearts of the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem were softened by God. It is a glorious thing when God's people allow their prejudices and traditions to be overcome by God's Word and work!

The Church in Antioch ([11:19-26](#))

Antioch was founded about 300 B.C. by Seleucus I, one of the inheritors of Alexander the Great's empire. He had a thing about founding cities and naming them after his father, Antioch, as he did this about *fifteen* times. This city of Antioch was called "Syrian Antioch" or "Antioch on the Orantes." Back then it was a city of more than half a million, and was considered by many the third greatest city in the Empire, behind Rome and Alexandria. Antioch was known for its sophistication and culture, but also for its immorality.

Today it is a Turkish city with a population of about 3,500.

Preaching the word to no one by the Jews only: At first, Christians scattered over the Roman Empire preached only to Jews. But they eventually began to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ to Gentiles as well.

The unnamed disciples from Cyprus and Cyrene are genuine heroes. They began the first mentioned "mission to the Gentiles" (here called Hellenists) in Antioch.

In Antioch, we have the first example of Christians deliberately targeting Gentiles for evangelism, and this effort had great results.

They sent out Barnabas: The church in Jerusalem sends an able man in Barnabas, previously known for his generosity (Acts 4:36-37) and his warm acceptance of Saul of Tarsus after he was converted (Acts 9:26-28).

Encouraged them with all purpose of heart: Barnabas is known as a great encourager, and here we see why. He focuses on his main job as a leader of the congregation. He strengthened the church family itself, with the result that a great many people were added to the Lord.

This is the church growth plan laid out in Ephesians 4:11-16. Leaders in the church dedicate themselves to building strong, healthy Christians. As the saints are equipped for the work of the ministry, they grow into maturity, and do their ministry, and it causes growth of the body.

Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul: Barnabas had to do some looking to find Saul. The word for "seek" here suggests a protracted or laborious search. This was years after we last encountered Saul, perhaps as many as 12.

The search, of course, paid off. For a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great number of people, strengthening the church in Antioch.

The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch: How did the name Christian ever become associated with the followers of Jesus? The ending "ian" meant "the party of." So a Christ-ian was "of the party of Jesus." Christians is sort of like saying "Jesus-ites," or "Jesus People," those of the group associated with Jesus Christ.

Soldiers under particular generals in the Roman army would identify themselves by their general's name by adding ian to the end. A soldier under Caesar would call himself a Caesarian. So it follows that "soldiers" under Jesus Christ could be called Christians.

In Antioch, they probably first used the term Christians to mock the followers of Jesus. But the Christians willingly accepted the title.

Eusebius, an early church historian, describes a believer from Lyons, France named Sanctus, who was tortured for his faith in Christ. His torturers tried to get him to renounce his faith, and to say something blasphemous. He answered all their taunts, jeers, and questions with "I am a Christian". "What nation do you belong to?" He would answer, "I am a Christian." "What city do you live in?" "I am a Christian." His questioners began to get angry: "Are you a slave or a free man?" "I am a Christian" was the only reply. No matter what they asked about him, he would only answer, "I am a Christian." This made his torturers all the more

determined to break him, but they could not, and he died with the words "I am a Christian" on his lips. (From Eusebius, *Church History*)

A Famine is Prophesied ([11:27-30](#))

Showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine: We don't know exactly how Agabus was showed by the Spirit that this famine was on the way. But the Christians took the word seriously, and generously began preparations to meet the needs of those who would be affected by it.

F. F. Bruce notes. "We know from other sources that Claudius's principate was marked by a succession of bad harvests and consequent scarcity in various parts of the empire - in Rome, Greece, and Egypt as well as in Judaea."

Sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul: The high regard that Barnabas and Saul had among all is evident by the fact that they were trusted with the relief fund.