

CONCERNING THE WAY

March 30, 2010

LESSON 96: THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES



Chapter 10

In this chapter we have a momentous event. The Holy Spirit, through this event, is showing us that salvation, given first to the Jews, is now available to all people. Some Gentiles had no doubt been saved before this (Samaritans, the deacon Nicolas, the Ethiopian eunuch), but this was God's official announcement that salvation was being extended to the Gentiles. It will be seen that way by the Jewish believers in chapter 11.

In chapter 9 God was preparing Peter for his upcoming experience with Cornelius in this chapter. He performed miracles, showing that God was with him in a special way. He was ministering in an area that was partially Gentile. And he was living in the home of a man whose work made him ceremonially unclean. This shows us how God will prepare us in small ways for something bigger he's going to bring into our lives later on – maybe soon, maybe much later.

Acts 10:1-2 Now there was a man in Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort. (2) He was a devout, God-fearing man, as was all his household; he did many acts of charity for the people and prayed to God regularly.

If you look at the map on page ten, you can see that Caesarea was a city on the coast of Palestine south of Mount Carmel. It was known as "Caesarea by the sea". Mostly Gentile, it was the Roman capital of Israel and the location of many of Herod the Great's building projects.

A centurion was a noncommissioned officer in the Roman army or one of the auxiliary territorial armies, commanding a centuria of (at least) 100 men. A "cohort" was a group of six centurions in command of six hundred men. A cohort was commanded by a "tribune". A Roman legion contained ten cohorts and was commanded by an imperial legate. There were five cohorts stationed in Caesarea, which means there were 30,000 Roman soldiers there. Centurions were similar to modern junior officers, but there was a wide gap in social status between them and officers, and not many were promoted beyond the rank of senior centurion. The Roman troops stationed in Judea were auxiliaries, who would normally be rewarded with Roman citizenship after 25 years of service. Some of the centurions may have served originally in the Roman legions (regular army) and then gained their citizenship at enlistment. Others may have inherited their citizenship, like Paul.

It's interesting that in the New Testament centurions are viewed in a positive way (Matthew 8:5-10; 27:54; Mark 15:44-45; Acts 22:25-26; 23:17-18; 27:6, 43). From the description of Cornelius as devout (eusebēs, used only here and in v. 7; 2 Peter 2:9) and God-fearing ("righteous and God-fearing," Acts 10:22), it can be inferred he was not a full-fledged proselyte to Judaism (he had not been circumcised, 11:3), but he did worship Yahweh. Evidently he attended the synagogue and to the best of his knowledge and ability followed the Old Testament Scriptures.

These kinds of people were called "proselytes of the gate" and were not full proselytes. Cornelius and his family may have had reserved places in the synagogue, but they had not made the transition to Judaism. The morality and cleanliness seen in the lives of the Hebrews from their obedience to the Mosaic Law attracted many Gentiles who were seeking God. But Cornelius had not yet come to know

the risen Jesus Christ, and so was not saved.

Acts 10:3-6 About three o'clock one afternoon he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God who came in and said to him, "Cornelius." (4) Staring at him and becoming greatly afraid, Cornelius replied, "What is it, Lord?" The angel said to him, "Your prayers and your acts of charity have gone up as a memorial before God. (5) Now send men to Joppa and summon a man named Simon, who is called Peter. (6) This man is staying as a guest with a man named Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea."

This would have been the time for afternoon prayer, so he must have seen the vision while he was in prayer. The language used in the expression "gone up as a memorial before God" is the same as saying "acceptable sacrifices" (Psalm 141:2). This angel must have been pretty imposing to have frightened this battle-hardened veteran officer. All he could say is, "What is it?"

Even though Cornelius was not truly a believer yet, he was devout and sincere in his worship of God. The things he practiced did not earn him salvation, but he was faithful with the light that he had been given so far. So God blessed his efforts by sending him more light, the light he needed to become saved. And God chose him to be used in this story that has been passed down throughout history as one of the first non-Jews to come to belief in Jesus Christ.

You know, this may be an example of how God deals with people at all times throughout history that have not heard the gospel of Jesus, but acknowledge the creator God in their heart and follow the light that they have. I believe that God works to bring more light to people like this.

Acts 10:7-8 When the angel who had spoken to him departed, Cornelius called two of his personal servants and a devout soldier from among those who served him, (8) and when he had explained everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.

These men whom Cornelius sent to bring Peter were most likely greatly influenced by his devotion to God. He may have even taught them from the Hebrew scriptures.

Acts 10:9-10 About noon the next day, while they were on their way and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. (10) He became hungry and wanted to eat, but while they were preparing the meal, a trance came over him.

We can assume that Peter prayed morning and evening, because those were normal times of prayer. But he also prayed at noon. Prayer three times a day was not commanded in the Scriptures, but Peter followed the example of godly men before him (David in Psalm 55:17; Daniel in Daniel 6:10).

Most of the roofs in the New Testament were flat roofs made of pounded dirt, sometimes mixed with lime or stones, supported by heavy wooden beams. They generally had either a sturdy wooden ladder or stone stairway to get to it, sometimes on the outside of the house. This would have been a good place to pray, and he would have been relieved to get some fresh air, being in a tanner's house!

A "trance" is the Greek word ekstasis, and Thayer defines it like this:

A throwing of the mind out of its normal state, alienation of mind, whether such as makes a lunatic or that of a man who by some sudden emotion is transported as it were out of himself, so that in this rapt condition, although he is awake, his mind is drawn off from all surrounding objects and wholly fixed on things divine that he sees nothing but the forms and images lying within, and thinks that he perceives with his bodily eyes and ears realities shown him by God.

Acts 10:11-14 He saw heaven opened and an object something like a large sheet descending, being let down to earth by its four corners. (12) In it were all kinds of four-footed animals and reptiles of the earth and wild birds. (13) Then a voice said to him, "Get up, Peter; slaughter and eat!" (14) But Peter said, "Certainly not, Lord, for I have never eaten anything defiled and ritually unclean!"

This would have included small four-footed animals like rats, mice, frogs, toads, salamanders, and lizards. Animals like this were forbidden by the Mosaic Law to be eaten (Leviticus 11:2-47). They were considered to be unclean. These food laws were one of the practices that made Jews different from their Gentile neighbors. That made eating meals with Gentiles very awkward.

Acts 10:15-16 The voice spoke to him again, a second time, "What God has made clean, you must not consider ritually unclean!" (16) This happened three times, and immediately the object was taken up into heaven.

He disobeyed God three times! Doing things like this in threes is becoming a habit for Peter. To be fair, though, maybe he thought God was testing him. Here's a scene where we see that it is possible to be careful about your behavior beyond the will of God. His intentions were good, but he was being disobedient. It is a lesson to us. We must not be so careful to obey the letter of the law (like a Pharisee) that we miss the point of the command and end up not listening to God or even disobeying Him. That may seem strange, but it's what happened with Peter.

This was a significant change for a Jew, and we can see more of what God was doing in Mark 7:14-23 where Jesus explains what truly makes a person unclean. Paul also speaks of it in Romans 14:14. But it was more than just about food. God was beginning a new thing, as Peter will see. He was teaching Peter a lesson, breaking down his prejudices.

Most people understand the point of this passage, that God is now accepting Gentiles. What a lot of people don't get, however, is the full ramifications of the vision - that the kosher laws do not apply to believers in Christ. They misunderstand the truth taught by Paul and in Hebrews that the Torah, the Mosaic Law, the "ministry of death and condemnation" (2 Corinthians 3:6-11), has been rendered inoperative by Christ's death and the establishment of the far superior New Covenant (Hebrews 8:6-13). These people burden themselves (and others) with self-imposed food restrictions, Sabbath keeping, and others of the 613 Mosaic laws that they choose or think are relevant.

I am not condemning those who choose to participate in or apply certain aspects of the Torah to their lives, like celebrating the feasts. We have the freedom in Christ to do that, but not out of a legal requirement, or as a means to salvation or even sanctification. Many people think that the more aspects of the Law they can fulfill, the more spiritual or sanctified it makes them. The Bible clearly teaches that the Law of Moses has no power to do that. We'll get into this more in future studies, but it is important to understand the full aspect of what Christ's death and resurrection did for us.

Acts 10:17-18 Now while Peter was puzzling over what the vision he had seen could signify, the men sent by Cornelius had learned where Simon's house was and approached the gate. (18) They called out to ask if Simon, known as Peter, was staying there as a guest.

This could have been somewhat confusing, since both men were named Simon.

Acts 10:19-20 While Peter was still thinking seriously about the vision, the Spirit said to

him, "Look! Three men are looking for you. (20) But get up, go down, and accompany them without hesitation, because I have sent them."

We see God's impeccable timing here. The three men from Cornelius arrive just as the vision ended.

Acts 10:21-23 So Peter went down to the men and said, "Here I am, the person you're looking for. Why have you come?" (22) They said, "Cornelius the centurion, a righteous and God-fearing man, well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to summon you to his house and to hear a message from you." (23) So Peter invited them in and entertained them as guests. On the next day he got up and set out with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him.

Notice the long and somewhat formal introduction of Cornelius by the men he sent to Peter. This would have been a culturally important thing to do, since Cornelius was a Gentile. And the fact that Peter invited them in and entertained them as guests was also a very big deal. It meant that he was accepting these Gentile men. The "brothers from Joppa" were other Jewish Christians who went along with Peter.

Acts 10:24-26 The following day he entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting anxiously for them and had called together his relatives and close friends. (25) So when Peter came in, Cornelius met him, fell at his feet, and worshiped him. (26) But Peter helped him up, saying, "Stand up. I too am a mere mortal."

The fact that Cornelius was waiting anxiously is no surprise considering that he knew that this meeting had been arranged by an angel. Can you imagine the anticipation you would have? And he had the faith to invite his relatives and close friends to his home to hear what Peter had to say. He was a good witness before he even had heard the gospel!

Cornelius still has his pagan ideas, though, as he tries to worship Peter, thinking maybe he is some kind of lesser god. Peter immediately corrects him.

Acts 10:27-29 Peter continued talking with him as he went in, and he found many people gathered together. (28) He said to them, "You know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile, yet God has shown me that I should call no person defiled or ritually unclean. (29) Therefore when you sent for me, I came without any objection. Now may I ask why you sent for me?"

So after thinking about it, Peter understood the meaning of the vision he had. It was not just about food, but about accepting Gentiles. By Jewish Law, even visiting a Gentile home would make you unclean. You were not supposed to eat with them or have any association with them. It's impossible for us to imagine how radical a change this was to Peter and the other Jewish Christians.

I should point out that these traditions were not from a sense of snobbery or pride. It was a concern about theological purity. Mixing with pagan Gentile cultures and religions was a constant problem for Israel throughout her history, and it always led her away from worship of the one true God and led to idolatry and apostasy.

Acts 10:30-33 Cornelius replied, "Four days ago at this very hour, at three o'clock in the afternoon, I was praying in my house, and suddenly a man in shining clothing stood before me (31) and said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your acts of

charity have been remembered before God. (32) Therefore send to Joppa and summon Simon, who is called Peter. This man is staying as a guest in the house of Simon the tanner, by the sea.' (33) Therefore I sent for you at once, and you were kind enough to come. So now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to say to us."

Cornelius tells Peter about his visitation by an angel exactly 96 hours before.

Acts 10:34-35 Then Peter started speaking: "I now truly understand that God does not show favoritism in dealing with people, (35) but in every nation the person who fears him and does what is right is welcomed before him.

Salvation for Gentiles was not completely a foreign concept to the Jews, and is even in the Old Testament (Jonah; Genesis 12:3). All people were supposed to be blessed by the Jews. They were to take the knowledge of God to the rest of the world. This idea kind of got lost along the way, though.

"The person who fears him and does what is right is welcomed before him" - this does not teach salvation by works because a person's first responsibility before God is to fear Him, which is to trust Him and reverence Him. It is the New Testament parallel to Micah 6:8. God's acceptance of these people refers to His welcoming them to a right relationship by faith in Christ (Acts 11:14).

Acts 10:36 You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, proclaiming the good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all) —

Don't run past this, the phrase "he is Lord of all" is the key to the whole speech. When we say "the Lord", or the "Lord Jesus Christ", we're using Old Testament language (Psalm 110:1). Both the Father and the Son are master of all. Since Jesus is Lord of all, the gospel can go to all people.

Acts 10:37-38 you know what happened throughout Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John announced: (38) with respect to Jesus from Nazareth, that God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, because God was with him.

"You know what happened" - I've pointed this out before, that the acts of Jesus were well known throughout the land of Israel. The phrase "God anointed Him" means God declared Him to be Messiah (Isaiah 61:1-3; Luke 4:16-21; Acts 4:27).

"All who were oppressed by the devil" - Notice how healing is tied to the cosmic battle that is continually going on in creation. Christ's power overcomes the devil and his forces, which are always trying to destroy humanity.

Acts 10:39-41 We are witnesses of all the things he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, (40) but God raised him up on the third day and caused him to be seen, (41) not by all the people, but by us, the witnesses God had already chosen, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.

Peter is telling Cornelius and all the people there that they had personally seen and ate with Jesus after His resurrection. His new body was 100% flesh, but also immortal, and we who belong to Him will also have bodies like this in the Kingdom.

Notice he says that the resurrected Jesus was not seen by everyone, but only to the witnesses God had already chosen. He purposely did not appear to those who would never believe in Him even if they felt his scars. God's sovereignty and election is obvious here.

Jesus did not appear before the Sanhedrin or in the temple, because it would have served no purpose. Those who had rejected Him already would not change their minds and bend their stiff necks. He only appeared to a select remnant of Israel, a select group of Jewish men and women who would see Him, believe He was the Messiah, and obey Him.

Peter's outline of Jesus' life and ministry is similar to the order and scope of Mark's gospel, which church tradition says was based on Peter's memories of those events.

Acts 10:42-43 He commanded us to preach to the people and to warn them that he is the one appointed by God as judge of the living and the dead. (43) About him all the prophets testify, that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

All people will stand before Jesus as judge, that authority has been given to Him by the Father. But those of us who have believed in Jesus have forgiveness of sins through Him. Verse 43 is as important as John 3:16. How do you receive salvation? By believing in Jesus – that is, believing in who He is and what He did. He is God and He died on the cross for my sins. John mentions this "belief alone" 40 times in his book. You cannot add anything to that!

God made it simple so that even children could understand it. They may not understand fully the theological implications of it, but even young children can be saved, because it is all about simple trust in Jesus. It is simple, but because of the rebelliousness of people, most people cannot even do that.

It's interesting to notice that Peter tailored his message to his Gentile audience. He did not quote any Hebrew scriptures to prove that Jesus fulfilled the Messianic prophecies, like he did at the temple and in front of the Sanhedrin. He didn't even focus on His Messiahship, but only said that He is the one "appointed by God to judge the living and the dead." They were not familiar with the scriptures and would not have understood them easily. He focused on the facts of Jesus' life and the events themselves, as he was a witness to them.

Acts 10:44-46 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all those who heard the message. (45) The circumcised believers who had accompanied Peter were greatly astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, (46) for they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said,

This was probably just an excerpt of Peter's message, and knowing Peter he had much more to say, but while he was speaking, the Holy Spirit came upon "all who heard". He had apparently said enough! So it wasn't just Cornelius, but also all his relatives who were there, along with the servants and friends who were listening believed in Christ and received the Holy Spirit. This was a shock to the Jewish believers there that had come with Peter. They thought the gift of the Holy Spirit was given only to the Jews.

Cornelius and his friends didn't raise their hands, or walk down the aisle to the altar, or pray a specific prayer. There was no apparent expression of repentance, either. They just believed the gospel that

Peter had proclaimed, and they were saved.

In this example of Gentiles believing in Christ, since Peter, the one who holds the keys to the Kingdom, was there, the Holy Spirit indwelt these people at the moment they believed in Christ. And they spoke in other languages. There would have been people in that place whose native tongues were Aramaic, different dialects of Greek, Latin, and possibly others. But they all were speaking in languages that they had not known before.

It's very likely that there were some in that audience that didn't understand the language Peter was speaking, at least not very well, because their native tongue was different. This gift of languages opened up their ears so that everyone could hear the gospel in their native tongues. This gift is always used in the book of Acts in a cosmopolitan area, where there are people from different countries and tongues present, and may not know the language being spoken. This is the purpose of this miracle, the gift of tongues.

Acts 10:47-48 "No one can withhold the water for these people to be baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?" (48) So he gave orders to have them baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay for several days.

Peter is surprised not by just the fact that these Gentiles received the Holy Spirit, but that they also had the exact same experience as the apostles had at Pentecost.

Peter was saying, well since God has shown us beyond all doubt that salvation and the Holy Spirit is now available to Gentiles as well, then they can also be baptized. You see, you have to understand that baptism was a way of life for a Jew. It was nothing terribly new to a Jew to be baptized, because they were always washing themselves for spiritual cleansing, for different reasons. It was the reason for the baptism that was different, now it was identifying with Christ. But baptism for a Gentile was a new experience; it was something they did not practice.

These verses are very important, because it proves that water baptism is not part of salvation. These people became believers, received the Holy Spirit just as the apostles did at Pentecost, so they are fully saved. But now Peter says they can be baptized.

Chapter 10

Acts 11:1 Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles too had accepted the word of God.

The "word of God" is another way to describe the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Acts 11:2-3 So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers took issue with him, (3) saying, "You went to uncircumcised men and shared a meal with them."

"Uncircumcised men", of course, are Gentiles. They were saying, "You mean you actually had a meal with a Gentile dog, and slept in his home? Peter, how could you do that!" This was not a polite discussion, but the original Greek indicates it was an intense argument. It was table fellowship with a Gentile and the possibility of eating unclean food that disturbed them so much, not the fact that Peter would preach the gospel to them.

Some of the Jewish Christians had a hard time letting go of the Mosaic Law. They still practiced everything just the way they had before, the only difference was that now they believed that Jesus was Messiah and He had died for their sins. There was deep-seated racial prejudice against Gentiles. They were not happy that the Gentiles were considered equal to them in the eyes of God, based on nothing more than their faith in Christ. They wanted the Gentiles to be circumcised and to keep the Law of Moses in order to become Christians. You'll see this issue come up again later on.

These were Jewish believers saying these things – how could they be so prejudiced? You would think they would have been delighted to hear that the Gentiles were accepting the Gospel. But prejudice is a strange thing. It makes no sense at all, but many men's minds are clouded with it – even Christians.

Acts 11:4 But Peter began and explained it to them point by point, saying,

Peter must have given them the end of the story first, and all they could see through their prejudicial minds were that he had eaten with a Gentile dog. So Peter goes back and starts from the beginning, telling the whole story step by step in a logical manner.

Acts 11:5-10 "I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision, an object something like a large sheet descending, being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came to me. (6) As I stared I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild animals, reptiles, and wild birds. (7) I also heard a voice saying to me, 'Get up, Peter; slaughter and eat!' (8) But I said, 'Certainly not, Lord, for nothing defiled or ritually unclean has ever entered my mouth!' (9) But the voice replied a second time from heaven, 'What God has made clean, you must not consider ritually unclean!' (10) This happened three times, and then everything was pulled up to heaven again.

These laws the Jews had concerning what animals they could eat were not moral laws. There was nothing morally wrong with killing certain animals for food. They were dietary restrictions, hygienic laws. And if God wants to make something clean that had previously been unclean, He can certainly do that. God's moral laws never change, but laws like this He did change. They are no longer valid.

God's purpose here was to prepare the Jews for another big change, offering salvation to the Gentiles. What had previously been considered unclean, all non-Jews, were not to be considered clean.

Acts 11:11-12 At that very moment, three men sent to me from Caesarea approached the house where we were staying. (12) The Spirit told me to accompany them without hesitation. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered the man's house.

This tells us there were six believers with Peter. That's three times as many witnesses as would normally be required to establish what happened (Deuteronomy 19:15). They would be able to confirm that Peter was telling the truth.

Acts 11:13-15 He informed us how he had seen an angel standing in his house and saying, 'Send to Joppa and summon Simon, who is called Peter, (14) who will speak a message to you by which you and your entire household will be saved.' (15) Then as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as he did on us at the beginning.

"At the beginning", of course, is Pentecost in Acts 2. The Holy Spirit came upon these Gentiles in exactly the same way as He did upon the Jewish believers in Acts 2.

*“Peter made an important identification of the day of Pentecost with the Lord’s prediction of Spirit baptism (1:4-5). Luke did not state specifically in chapter 2 that Pentecost was that fulfillment, but Peter here pointedly said so by the phrase **at the beginning** (cf. 10:47, “just as we have,” and 11:17, “the same gift as He gave us”). The Church Age, then, began on the day of Pentecost”. John Walvoord*

Acts 11:16-17 And I remembered the word of the Lord, as he used to say, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' (17) Therefore if God gave them the same gift as he also gave us after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to hinder God?"

Peter remembered what Jesus had said years before. God was giving Gentiles the same gift He gave to the believers at Pentecost. The only difference was that, in the case of Cornelius and his household, belief and the reception of the Spirit were at the same time. This is the way it happens today.

Like the physical washing John the Baptist did, the Holy Spirit now does a spiritual washing when we accept Christ. He then indwells us, places us positionally into the Body of Christ, and gives us spiritual gifts to be used in the Body (1 Corinthians 12). God is sovereign over which gift He gives to each believer. And, summing up, Peter basically says, "This was not my idea, I didn't make this up! It is God's idea, so how can we go against it?"

Acts 11:18 When they heard this, they ceased their objections and praised God, saying, "So then, God has granted the repentance that leads to life even to the Gentiles."

These verses are of huge importance, folks. You should mark this in the Bible, "This changed the course of history". Where before only Jews were able to receive salvation, now Greeks, Romans, Africans, and all people everywhere can come to Jesus and accept Him as Lord and Savior of their lives. They now can receive the same benefits as the Jews.

These men quieted down and accepted what God was doing, and praised Him for it. "The repentance that leads to life" – that is what salvation is. It is recognizing that you are a sinner that is separated from God and that Jesus died for you so that you will not die, but will live forever.

Acts 11:19-21 Now those who had been scattered because of the persecution that took place over Stephen went as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, speaking the message to no one but Jews. (20) But there were some men from Cyprus and Cyrene among them who came to Antioch and began to speak to the Greeks too, proclaiming the good news of the Lord Jesus. (21) The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord.

Phoenicia was an area along the Mediterranean coast north of Palestine. Cyprus is a large island in the Mediterranean of the south coast of Asia Minor. Antioch was a city in Syria, probably the third largest city in the Greco-Roman world, behind Rome and Alexandria, having about 500,000 people. It was the New York city of its day, very cosmopolitan and very immoral. With a large colony of Jews, it was natural that many of the scattering Hellenistic Jews would come there, arriving by water first from the Phoenician coastlands as they traveled north, with some instead sailing to the island of Cyprus. Cyrene was a city on the northern African coast west of Egypt.

World of the New Testament, Around A.D. 50



These were all primarily Gentile areas. So these Jewish believers that were scattered after the death of Stephen preached the message to only Jews in those areas. But some received that message and then began preaching to the Gentiles in Antioch. And many came to faith in Christ. This is the first concerted effort to spread the gospel to the Gentiles, and it caused the first outbreak of salvation of large numbers of Gentiles. The gospel went from Jew to Jew, then from Jew to Gentile, and then from Gentile to Gentile.

And this was a move of God. He was the one causing this great acceptance of the gospel by Gentiles. Antioch became one of the most important cities in the early church era. This was the first great church in a Gentile area, and became the first seminary, which lasted for three hundred years. They taught literal interpretation of the Bible. Antioch became the center for Bible learning. The literal interpretation of the Bible even became known as the “Antiochan” method of interpreting the Bible.

Acts 11:22 A report about them came to the attention of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch.

They didn’t have telephones, email, Facebook, or Twitter in those days. News spread by word of mouth, and eventually word got back to the apostles in Jerusalem about what was happening In Antioch. So they sent Barnabas, who we’ve met before, to find out what was going on. The Jerusalem church was still acting as sort of the overseer of all the churches. Barnabas was a good choice, because he was actually from Cyprus.

Acts 11:23-24 When he came and saw the grace of God, he rejoiced and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with devoted hearts, (24) because he was a good

man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith, and a significant number of people were brought to the Lord.

True to the meaning of his name, Barnabas was a great encourager of the believers there. He apparently was strong in the gifts of encouragement and of faith, given to him by the Holy Spirit. You can see how God is working through these events. He is orchestrating all of these things! And, even though this was a special time in history, He does the same today. He orchestrates the events of history, of us as a group of believers, and of our individual lives.

Acts 11:25-26 Then Barnabas departed for 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 a significant number of people. Now it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians.

Why did Barnabas go get Saul and bring him back to Antioch? Because Saul, as we've discussed before, understood the Greek mind. He was raised in a Gentile area and was comfortable dealing with both Jews and Gentiles. So Paul would be more effective in teaching Gentile believers than a Jew would be. He had an incredible understanding of the Old Testament scriptures and the pagan mind both. And Paul had been studying the scriptures and was getting an understanding of what God was doing among the Gentiles.

And here in Antioch believers are first called "Christians". Among the Jews in Israel they were known as "followers of The Way", and now among Gentiles they will be known as Christians.

Acts 11:27-28 At that time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. (28) One of them, named Agabus, got up and predicted by the Spirit that a severe famine was about to come over the whole inhabited world. (This took place during the reign of Claudius.)

The famine spoken of here allows us to confirm the date of this part of Acts. It took place from 45-48 A.D., so this would have been just before that. And Claudius was the emperor of the Roman Empire from 41-54 A.D.

There were still prophets at that time. There was still no New Testament scriptures written as yet, except for possibly a few copies of the gospel of Matthew, so there was still a need for men who had been specially gifted by the Holy Spirit to understand doctrine before it had been written down, and teach it to others. They were teachers, not just guys who were able to foretell the future. This special ability was gradually withdrawn as the need lessened with more and more writings of the apostles (1 Corinthians 13:8). The early church fathers attest to this. This man, Agabus, is the only man in the New Testament, except for the original apostles, who seemed to have the ability to give prophecies about the future.

Acts 11:29-30 So the disciples, each in accordance with his financial ability, decided to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. (30) They did so, sending their financial aid to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

Here we have one of the first accounts of charitable giving. The church in Antioch took up a collection for the believers in Judea, possibly because of the famine. This is the first mention of church elders in Acts and it says that they received the financial aid. Evidently they had oversight over all aspects of

the ministry (1 Timothy 3:1).

Notice what's going on in the early church here. You have a lot of communication happening between the churches, and a lot of traveling. You have the key church and Bible study center developing in Antioch. And you see the concern the believers have, both Jew and Gentile, for starving believing Jews in Israel. This is a great lesson for us that has been lost in many ways today.