



Walking Through the Scripture Together

June 8 - 14, 2008

Acts 11:1-30

Pushback

Text Acts 11:1-30 (TNIV)

1 The apostles and the believers 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 the uncircumcised and ate with them."

4 Starting from the beginning, Peter told them the whole story: **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. **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. **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 he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God's way?"

18 When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, "So then, even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life."

19 Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. **20** Some of them, however, men from Cyprus

and Cyrene, 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.

22 News of this reached the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. **23** When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, 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 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. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) **29** The disciples, as each one was able, decided to provide help for the believers living in Judea. **30** This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

Thought

Things were not static in the social and political world of Jerusalem through the 40s and 50s of the first century. Far from it. The pace was heating up. Pressure was mounting that would eventually lead to a massive revolt and the bloodiest and most disastrous war in Jewish history, ending with Jerusalem being destroyed by the Romans in AD 70. People were not, in other words, sitting around in Jerusalem discussing, as an abstract issue, the question of the value of circumcision and the food laws. These were the equivalents of the national flag at a time when the whole nation felt under intense pressure. To welcome Gentiles as equal brothers and sisters must have looked like fraternizing with the enemy. To be 'zealous for the law,' including circumcision and the food laws, must have looked like the only way that would fit into the will of God for his people.

If we want to understand, and learn from, the complex debates faced by the early church, we would do well to ponder their entire situation, and contemplate the ways in which our own theological debates are more conditioned than we sometimes realize by the swirling currents of political, social, and cultural pressure.

Acts for Everyone

Small Group Discussion Guide

Lean In

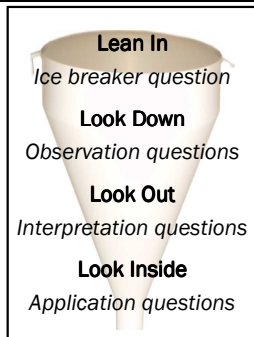
- When have you recently found yourself on the receiving end of criticism? How do you handle feedback from others? What makes feedback more palatable to you?

Look Down / Look Out

- Why did the Jewish believer's criticize Peter? What was their problem?
- How do you think Peter handled the criticism he received? How did he manage to turn them from criticizing him to praising God?
- When news of what was happening in Antioch filtered down to Jerusalem, how did the church there respond?
- What did Barnabas see and do upon arriving in Antioch? What impact did he have?
- Why do you think Barnabas thought of Saul at this point? What does Barnabas do? A decade after we last saw him, how do you think Saul felt when Barnabas found him?
- What message did the Jewish prophet Agabus share in this heavily gentile church? How did the fellowship in Antioch respond?

Look Inside

- What is the place of prophecy in the body of Christ today?
- How do you typically respond to impending crisis? What can we learn from the church in Antioch — individually and as a church?



details, details...

The Jerusalem believers criticized him

The word Luke uses here is the same used by the Holy Spirit to Peter when he told Peter to go with the men Cornelius sent "asking no questions." Here it implies that a pretty hot debate started and continued. You have to imagine Peter surrounded by red faces, loud voices, and stomping feet. In other words, it's not a pleasant conversation that starts up here.

You entered the home of gentiles

This is a bit stronger and colorful than it might sound. Peter's Jewish brothers would typically refer to Cornelius' type as a "goy" which is equivalent to an outsider from another nation, but here they go beyond that to calling Cornelius and his guests *akrobustia* which we usually translate "uncircumcision" (really a bit too clinical for a translation) but which really means foreskin. Not something you would call your friends. The use of the word further underlies the fury Peter faced.

They were called 'Christians' first in Antioch

People within the city — evidently the nonbelievers who were more perceptive in this matter than the church itself — nicknamed this group of Jewish and Gentile believers "Christians." (i.e., "Christ followers," or "those of the household of Christ"). They thereby voiced an insight that the Christians themselves only saw clearly later on: Christianity is no mere variant of Judaism. The use of the name "Christian" posed two great problems for the church. For one thing, Christians began to risk losing the protection that Rome gave to a *religio licita* (i.e., a legal religion; cf. "Luke's Purposes in Writing Acts" in the introduction to Acts), which they had enjoyed when considered only a sect within Judaism. Furthermore, being now in some way differentiated from Judaism, Christians were faced with how to understand their continuity with the hope of Israel and the promises of the Jewish Scriptures. As we shall see, these problems were to loom large as the Christian mission moved onto Gentile soil.

Family Discussion Guide

Day One Acts 11:1-10

What do you usually do when someone says they don't like what you are doing? Do you just stop? Do you get mad? Do you just keep doing it anyway? Do you talk about it?

Day Two Acts 11:11-18

What do you learn from how Peter answered the people who weren't happy about what he did? How can we learn to listen to others better and to speak with a good tone and attitude?

Day Three Acts 11:19-21 2 Timothy 4:3-5

How easy is it for you to share your faith with other people? What do you usually say and do? When have you shared your faith with someone recently — and what happened?

Day Four Acts 11:22-26

What would you say is the key to being a good encourager like Barnabas was? How often do you find yourself including someone who is sitting off by themselves?

Day Five Acts 11:27-30 Galatians 6:9-10

How easy is it for you to share what you have with others? What would you say are some good reasons to share? What can help us to share more generously with other people?

Bible Life and Times

Antioch of Syria

Antioch of Syria was founded about 300 B.C. by Seleucus I Nicator, who named it after either his father or his son, both of whom bore the name Antiochus. It was situated on the Orontes River about three hundred miles north of Jerusalem and twenty miles east of the Mediterranean, at the joining of the Lebanon and Taurus mountain ranges where the Orontes breaks through and flows down to the sea. To distinguish it from some fifteen other Asiatic cities built by Seleucus and also named Antioch, it was frequently called "Antioch-on-the-Orontes." During the first Christian century, it was, after Rome and Alexandria, the third largest city in the empire, having a population of more than 500,000.



It was a melting pot of Western and Eastern cultures, where Greek and Roman traditions mingled with Semitic, Arab, and Persian influences. The Jewish population is estimated to have been about one-seventh of the total population and had vested rights to follow its own laws within its three or more settlements in and around the city. During the reign of Caligula (A.D. 37-41), however, many Jews were killed; and during the tumultuous period of the middle and late 60s, Jewish acceptance and prosperity in Antioch came to an end.

In Christian history, apart from Jerusalem, no other city of the Roman Empire played as large a part in the early life and fortunes of the church as Antioch of Syria and was the birthplace of foreign missions.

