

Acts Chapter 11

Theme of Acts: The Holy Spirit and the Birth of the Church

Personal Reflection

Complete this section in one sitting or little by little during the week. Begin with prayer, inviting the Holy Spirit into your time. Spending time in the Bible, studying the original intent, meaning and cultural context helps you to understand how it applies to you now.

Further Study: with your small group or on your own

Complete with your small group if you are in one; or complete on your own, spending time with God.

Song for the week: Here as in Heaven - Elevation Worship

Song links: <https://youtu.be/rCog-fv4PGw?si=HqWlhCRMCPww0gnL>

Personal Reflection

Read Acts 11 Click on any Bible verse in the study to read it or use your own Bible.

In Acts 11 a major theme is that God took the initiative in the salvation of the Gentiles. Where there was separation, God worked to provide salvation as well as relationship and community.

In the beginning, God created the world and everything in it was good. Humans were made in His image and had relationship with each other and Him. Then Adam and Eve choose to disobey God, causing a separation between them and God. But God, in His graciousness, provided a way to redeemed relationship with Him. But for humans, separation continued to rise up. *Optional, read Genesis 1:27, Genesis 2:18, Genesis 1:31, Genesis 3:1-24*

Several generations later, God made a covenant with Abraham in which the people's part was for men to be circumcised. It was an outward physical sign between God and the Jewish people. "With the removal of this portion of the male anatomy often associated with uncleanness ... God was showing Abraham and those who would be blessed through him that sin needed to be removed in order for salvation to occur (Gentle Reformation)." *Optional, read Genesis 17:8-14*

Abraham's grandson Jacob had 12 sons. Jealousy caused separation between the sons resulting in their selling their brother Joseph into slavery. Later when they were united, Jacob blessed his own sons along with Joseph's sons, Ephriam and Manasseh, as though they were his own sons. He gave Joseph's sons Samaria (the northern kingdom) while his other sons settled in Judea (the southern kingdom). *Optional, read Genesis 12:6-8, Genesis 33:18-20, Genesis 37, Genesis 48-49*

During Jesus' time, there was separation between these kingdoms. The Jews in Judea worshiped God in Jerusalem while those in Samaria worshiped God on Mount Gerizim. After Assyria conquered Samaria, it was mixed with Gentiles and their worship of pagan gods. The Judeans looked down on the Samaritans.

Jesus told a parable using Samaria. The parable challenged the separation of those in Judea and Samaria. How did it point to a redeeming relationship? (Luke 10:25-37)

Later Jesus said He HAD to go to Samaria. His disciples were with Him. There Jesus met the woman at the well. She became the first person in Samaria to believe in Jesus and to witness there about Him. How might Jesus' example have impacted Peter and Phillip? (John 5:1-42)

After Jesus's ascension, the believers experienced Pentecost. There was no separation from God as they received the gift of the Holy Spirit living with them. *Optional, read Acts 2:1-4*

In Acts 8:5-25, Philip went to Samaria; then Peter and John joined him. New believers there also received the Holy Spirit. In Acts 10 Peter again went to Samaria. This time Peter was criticized as he ate with the Samaritans. *Optional, read Acts 10:23-24, Acts 11:1-3*

Those present in Jerusalem listening to Peter's story were all followers of the Law, including being circumcised, following the covenant between God and Abraham. They believed that it was unlawful to eat with uncircumcised Gentiles, even if the Gentiles believed in Jesus and were baptized.

But God was at work to eliminate the separation; the separation between God and humans (salvation) as well as between Judeans and Samaritans, Jews and Gentiles.

Read Luke 22:17-20. Jesus brought in a new covenant, one that replaced the one God had with Abraham. This was the good news that the apostles were teaching. In this covenant, how was sin atoned for in order for salvation to occur?

Peter explained to his listeners the ways God's hand was present. First, while he was praying in Joppa (located in Judea) God gave a vision to Peter. Peter wasn't trying to come up with some new theology. God, not Peter, originated this process.

God sent His angel to Cornelius who was in Samaria with instructions for how to contact Peter. God orchestrated the arrival of the Gentile messengers from Cornelius with Peter's vision. God specifically told Peter to go without any misgivings. God was at work in both Judea and Samaria.

God uses us fallible humans to further the gospel. The angel did not preach the gospel to Cornelius, but rather told him that Peter would speak words by which he would be saved. God's sovereignty saved the Gentiles and sent the Holy Spirit upon them even before Peter finished his sermon.

Peter realized his vision was not about food but people. "Full import of his original experience needed time to develop and be understood. Often we understand the spiritual meaning of events in retrospect (Life with God Bible)."

Like Peter, God challenges us to change our wrong thinking. Revisit a memory where this was true for you. Take a moment and write about it and thank God for transforming your thinking.

Peter's recounting of what happened in Caesarea confirmed to the believers in Jerusalem that the good news of salvation by Christ alone, was for both the circumcised and uncircumcised. God did not withhold the Holy Spirit from any who believed. There was no separation.

Barnabas, an encourager who was full of the Holy Spirit and faith, was sent to Samaria. Barnabas did not encourage good works but rather that the people "continue with the Lord". As Gentiles began to believe, there was a shift from Jewish heritage (old covenant) to following Jesus (new covenant). *Optional, read Acts 4:36. Acts 11:23-24*

How would you describe “continuing with the Lord”?

When Barnabase went to look for Saul in Tarsus, it had been about 8 years since Saul’s conversion. These years were not “wasted” or “lost,” but spent in quiet ministry and preparation for future service. God had been equipping him to do the unique job he had called him to do which was to be the apostle to the Gentiles. *Optional, read Acts 9:10-15, Acts 11:25, Galatians 2:8, timeline of Acts*

Do you sense God equipping you for a specific calling? If so, spend some time writing about it.

God’s message of a pending famine shared through Agabus allowed the believers in Antioch to help the believers in Judea, “who most likely lost their fields, property and homes before being imprisoned. The Roman persecution of Christians didn’t start until 66 AD, so the church in Antioch at this time had more resources to share with their suffering Christian brothers and sisters in Judea (biblestudytools.com).”

There was a reciprocity where once there was separation - the Jewish believers shared the gospel (spiritual wealth) and the believers in Antioch shared their physical wealth.

Putting it into practice:

GOD CHANGES US as we seek to walk with Him. It was while Peter was praying that the Lord gave him the life-changing vision. If Peter had skipped his prayer time, he might have missed what God wanted to do through him. God will not change your thinking if you rarely spend time alone with Him.

What does your time with God look like? How frequent is it?

GOD CHANGES US through uncomfortable circumstances. God sovereignly intervened in Peter’s prayer time with His ideas and His agenda!

Recall an uncomfortable circumstance. How did God use it to change you?

GOD CHANGES US by repeating the lesson until it sinks in. The Lord had to repeat the vision three times for Peter. Luke repeats this story twice for every reader of Scripture.

If God has been repeating anything to you recently, what is it? Are you ready to listen?

GOD CHANGES US by appealing to our thinking with His Word of truth. Peter shared the process that God took him through to change his thinking.

Read Romans 12:2. What thinking do you need God to transform for you?

GOD CHANGES US so that He can use us in greater ways to fulfill His purpose in saving the lost. These things happened about seven years after the Day of Pentecost. Philip had seen the Samaritans and the Ethiopian eunuch get saved. God had to jar Peter and use some persecution to get the message flowing to the Gentiles. *Optional, read Acts 11:19*

Read Isaiah 43:19. Where is God calling you to get curious and notice the new thing that He is doing?

Further Study - with your small group or on your own

Going back to Genesis, people's choices separated them first from God, then each other.

Where do you need to shift to being curious about what God is doing and focus on being unified with other believers?

How can we do as Barnabas encouraged believers to do - "continue with the Lord"?

Sometimes separation / being set apart was because God instructed it. With the old covenant it was circumcision. We are now living in the new covenant, called to being set apart differently.

Watch this video by Louie Giglio. Click here: [Louie Giglio's video on being set apart](#). What are some ways we can set ourselves apart so others see Jesus in us?

Initially, the term Christian was a term of mockery. "Those who believed that Christ was king could be accused of treason and the term Christian became a legal charge ... It would become a welcome title for Jesus followers but in the beginning it was merely ridicule. Antioch had a reputation for mocking people (Cultural Background Study Bible)." *Optional, read Peter 4:16*

People get confused about what makes a person a Christian. It is not being born into a family or culture, it's not being baptized, it is not going to church. It's not even praying to God or knowing He is real. Demons know the Bible and know that Jesus is God. Knowing there is a God is not the same as having a personal relationship with Him.

A Christian isn't someone who merely believes that Jesus is God, but someone who believes that Jesus is THEIR God, their Savior and their Lord. Belief is the beginning! Believing in Jesus for salvation brings the gifts of forgiveness, right relationship with God (no separation!) and the presence of the Holy Spirit dwelling in a person. A complete on-going relationship. *Optional, read James 2:19*

Our relationships with God are as different as we are from each other. Each relationship is personal. To encourage each other in your small group, discuss: How are you engaging with God? How do you spend time with Him?

When sharing the gospel, how might you explain to someone the difference between knowing something is true and making it personal?

Pray

"Antioch was also a particularly wicked city that was mired in temple prostitution and other pagan abominations related to various Roman, Greek and other idols. Christians were invading Satan's stronghold as Jesus had commanded (Bibleversestudy.com)."

Where do you see strongholds of Satan in your town, state and country? Name some and then spend time praying as a small group, asking God to break the strongholds and bring people to Him.

Follow Up

Is there anything from this week's personal reflection time which you would like to discuss more with your small group?