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Acts 11:1 - 30



Acts - Steve Gregg

In Acts 11, Steve Gregg shares the story of Peter's visit to Cornelius' house, the first Gentile family to be converted to Christianity. This event challenges the idea that Gentiles had to become Jews to be saved and was controversial in the early church. The spread of Christianity to Gentile regions led to multitudes of people coming to Christ and the disciples becoming known as Christians. Gregg emphasizes that becoming a disciple of Christ means prioritizing Him over everything else, taking up the cross willingly, and recognizing that one belongs to God.

Transcript

Tonight we're looking at Acts chapter 11. Now, in the previous chapter we had at length the story of the conversion of Cornelius and those in his house through the instrumentality of Peter. And the entire chapter, which is not a short one, was occupied with this story.

Now much of that story is going to be retold in detail in chapter 11. Now, why? Well, because Peter went into the house of a Gentile and ate with him and baptized these men and women when the Holy Spirit fell upon them unexpectedly. Peter said, well, okay, these people have received the Holy Spirit like we have.

Who can forbid them to be baptized with water? So he commanded them to be baptized, and that is the last we heard, except that Peter stayed there for a few days. This was the first Gentile family to be converted, and no doubt Peter had a lot of orientation to give them and spent a few days with them. This family was not entirely pagan because although they were Gentiles, Cornelius had some familiarity with the Jewish faith and had feared the Jewish God, as it says, and had offered prayers and given alms for the sake of Israel's God.

But he had not become a Jew, and nor does he become a Jew at this time. Now, what we have to understand here is something that does not come to us naturally. This is very far removed from our thinking.

Remember, we're reading stories about people who lived 2,000 years ago in a culture

very different from our own, particularly the Jewish culture. I mean, even the Gentiles were in a culture very different than our own, but the Jewish culture was very distinctive. Circumcision, since the time of Abraham in Genesis 17, was set as the mark of the covenant that God had with Abraham and his offspring.

And God had told Abraham, anyone who is not circumcised of your offspring will be cut off from his people. The mark of circumcision was the mark of being in the covenant with God. Now, the Jews were commanded to circumcise their children on the eighth day, their boys, on the eighth day of their life.

And so every Jewish boy from an observant Jewish home was circumcised. And this was his, we could say, his backstage pass to God. This was his special badge of honor, that he was one of God's people, descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, circumcised to prove it.

Not that people went around showing this kind of stuff off, but if you were asked whether you were circumcised or not, if you could answer yes, and you were a Jew, you were proud to say yes. And when Paul, for example, in Philippians chapter 3, begins to list the things that he said were gained to him before his conversion to Christ, the first thing he mentions, I was circumcised on the eighth day, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, and so forth. This is what set Jews off from Gentiles.

Now, we have to remember that God never intended that the Jews would be alone, God's people. In the Old Testament, in fact, when God first spoke to Abram in Genesis chapter 12, and in the other occasions when God repeated His promise to Abram, the promise to Abram was that through his seed, all the families of the earth would be blessed. Through his seed, all the nations of the earth would be blessed.

It was not just for Israel. I've had people call my radio show and ask, you know, why did God only choose Israel? Doesn't He care about the Gentiles? No, He chose Israel to reach the Gentiles. That's what He had in mind.

It was their assignment to know God and to make Him known to the world, to all nations. God's promise was that not that Abram's seed would be saved and the rest would be lost, but rather that his seed would be instrumental in bringing the knowledge of God to all the nations of the world. Now, we know from what Paul says in Galatians 3, especially verse 16, that Abram's seed, through whom the promises are to be fulfilled, is Christ.

Paul says it in Galatians 3.16, he says, He does not say to your seeds as of many, but to your seed, singular, which is Christ. Meaning that Abram's seed, through whom all the nations would be blessed, is Christ. Now, the apostles had not yet, at this time, until Peter came to the house of Cornelius, understood that the Gentiles could be saved without becoming Jews.

Now, in the Old Testament, there's many prophecies about the Gentiles praising God with His people Israel. There's many prophecies about the Messiah being a king over the kings of the earth and the Lord of the lords and His kingdom growing like a great mountain to fill the whole earth. It was understood that all the earth, including the Gentiles, would be impacted by the Messiah.

But, in the Old Testament, if a Gentile wanted to become one of God's people, he had to be circumcised. He had to become a Jew. You didn't have to remain a Gentile simply because you were born a Gentile.

You could be circumcised. You could become a Jew. And if you did, you were what was called a proselyte.

A proselyte was a Gentile-born person who had become a Jew by being circumcised. And the Jews did not have any problem with this. They were very prejudiced against uncircumcised people.

They were very prejudiced against Gentiles or pagans. But, if a Gentile would join them through circumcision, then that Gentile would be, as the Old Testament phrase uses it, like a native of the land. That is, like a native of the land of Israel.

So that, to the Jews throughout the Old Testament, it was understood Gentiles can be a part of this. Sure. Welcome.

As long as you're circumcised. You have to become a Jew to become one of God's people. And becoming a Jew means getting circumcised.

Now, the early Christians, there had already been one Ethiopian who had been converted and baptized in chapter 8 by Philip. But it doesn't tell us his ethnicity. He may have been a Jew from Ethiopia or he may have been a Gentile who was a proselyte.

If he was either of those two things, it would not be controversial to the early church at this stage. Because, although they believed only, well, they believed anyone could be saved, they believed they had to become a Jew. It was the Jewish Messiah, after all.

Jesus was the Jews' Messiah. He was the answer to the promises made to the fathers of the Jews. And therefore, of course, it's only reasonable if you want to benefit from the Jewish Messiah, you should be a Jew.

And it had never crossed anyone's mind, apparently, in the church up until the time of Cornelius' conversion, that a person might become one of God's people without ever becoming a Jew first. Without ever becoming circumcised. Even after Cornelius' conversion, this remained somewhat controversial in the Jerusalem church.

And they had to have a special council about it in Acts 15. To see if the Gentiles who

were coming to Christ needed to be Jews first. Did they have to become proselytes? Did they have to get circumcised? Now, when Peter received a vision that told him not to call anything unclean that God had cleansed.

And he went to the house of Cornelius and preached and saw that the Holy Spirit fell on these uncircumcised Gentiles. Peter's mind was open. And he said, okay, let's baptize these people.

He did not command them to be circumcised. He understood now that you don't have to be a Jew or even a proselyte to be one of God's people. You can be any race, any kindred, any nation, any tongue.

And if you were a follower of Christ, you're in. Now, Peter understood this, but the Jerusalem apostles weren't fully aware of this yet. And when Peter came back to Jerusalem from Caesarea where he'd met the household of Cornelius, the apostles in Jerusalem had heard already about this and they confronted him.

And it says in chapter 11 of Acts, verse 1, Now, the apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had received the word of God. And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him. Now, the expression those of the circumcision is used more than one way in Scripture.

Sometimes it means the circumcision party. There was a party within the church that for some time after this still insisted that Gentile Christians should be circumcised. They were called the circumcision party.

They were the ones who gave trouble to Paul's converts in Galatia. In fact, Paul wrote the book of Galatians to confound the circumcision party and to show that they were wrong. But the circumcision is also a term that's used simply for a person who's a Jew.

The Jews were called the circumcision. The Gentiles were called the uncircumcision. And so when it says those who are of the circumcision, we don't have to assume that this was the specially obstinate circumcision party that were resistant.

This is just the ordinary Jews, the Jewish Christians, the other apostles. They contended with him. They said, you went in to the uncircumcised men and ate with them.

Notice they don't even complain that he baptized them, only that he ate with them. Table fellowship was forbidden between Jews and Gentiles. And, you know, of course, Peter didn't go there to eat with them.

He went there to convert them, but he did end up staying with them and eating. So this was controversial. And Peter explained it to them in order from the beginning, saying, now here's where we get the whole story, almost in as much detail as we got it in chapter 10.

The fact that Luke, who has to decide what to include in his history and what to leave out, and has a limited number of pages and expensive ink, that he would give us the whole story twice in detail must be for the purpose of emphasis. Of course, he could have just said, and Peter just told them the whole story we just read about in the previous chapter, and then let's move on with the story. Instead, he tells the whole story again, just so we will realize this is something he doesn't want us to miss.

He wants us to notice this. Did you miss it reading through chapter 10? Well, you're going to get it again now in chapter 11. And he says, but now we get it from Peter's voice.

We had it from Luke, the author's voice in chapter 10. Now we have Peter's voice giving the story. He said, Which, of course, was a reference to unclean animals that Jews would normally not eat, and he was a Jew.

But I said, Now, this was done three times, and all were drawn up again into heaven. Doubting nothing. These six brethren must have been accompanying him to Jerusalem.

He points, these six brethren. Now, we were told in chapter 10 that some brethren from Joppa did go with Peter. We were not told how many.

This is where we learned there were six of them. And those six were the ones who were astonished in chapter 10, verse 45. When the Holy Spirit fell on the Gentiles, it says in chapter 10, verse 45, Those were the six men, the six Jewish men that came with Peter from Joppa to Caesarea.

And so we now know there were six. We weren't told their number previous to this. He says, Now, notice he says, Now, notice he says, When I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell.

We saw in chapter 10, he actually gave a bit of a sermon, but it was not very long. When he says, as I began to speak, I think he's suggesting that the part we read in chapter 10 was only what he intended to be the beginning of his sermon. He was just starting.

He was just getting warmed up. The sermon would have been much longer, except God interrupted the service. And he says, when I had begun to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them.

And he said, as upon us at the beginning. He's talking to the Jerusalem church, and it was at Jerusalem at Pentecost that the spirit had fall upon them. So he's saying their experience was really like ours.

Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, That's a quote from, of course, what Jesus said just before he ascended in Acts 1, 5. When they heard these things, they became silent and they glorified God, saying, They were surprised, but they were

acquiescent. What could they say? First of all, Peter had a divine vision telling him not to call anyone unclean if God was not going to call them unclean, which was sort of a hint that that would include people. And then he tells how the Holy Spirit fell upon them.

I mean, what are we going to say? They had to remain silent. They said, well, I guess then God has granted repentance to the Gentiles also. Now, the expression granted repentance is used more than one place in Scripture.

In 2nd Timothy 2, near the end of the chapter, there's also a reference to God granting repentance. 2nd Timothy 2, verses 24 through 26, Paul said, God granting repentance again so that they may know the truth and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will. So we read here of God granting repentance.

You'll also find places where the Bible says it has been granted to you to believe. Faith and repentance are both spoken of as grants. And this is one of the places.

And some people feel that this should be understood to mean that God simply decides who will repent and believe and then kind of puts it on, makes them repent and believe. Well, I guess the word could be taken that way. But to say that something is granted is not the same thing as to say it is imposed on somebody.

To receive a grant, to qualify for a grant for some government agency or some school, to say you qualify for a grant, we will pay for your tuition or whatever. That doesn't mean that you have to go to that school. You might not like the school.

You might not want to go to that school, in which case the grant will be declined. It is a grant and it is free. Some people say, well, if you have to receive it, if you have to accept it, then it's not from God.

That's just you. You're earning your salvation. But accepting a gift is not earning anything.

People who accept gifts have not earned anything by doing so. A gift is still a gift. But a person usually has an opportunity to decide, do I want this gift or not? And we do find that there are people in Scripture who are... God is desiring for them to receive this gift and they do not.

For example, in Luke 7.30, Luke 7.30 talks about the Pharisees. It says how that they rejected the will of God for themselves by not being baptized by John. Now, that statement means nothing if it doesn't mean that God wanted them to be baptized by John.

But they rejected that will of God for them by not being baptized by John. Or in Matthew 23.37, Jesus says, Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how many times I would have gathered your

children as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. But you would not.

I would have gathered you if I could have. I wanted to. But you would not.

Many times in the Old Testament, God says, I called, but no one answered. No one responded. I called and you didn't come.

Even way back in the days of Cain and Abel. When God received Abel's sacrifice and rejected Cain's and Cain was angry, God rebuked him and said, Cain, if you do well, will you not also be accepted? In other words, you're not accepted. You know, I didn't preordain you to do the wrong thing.

You didn't do the right thing. And if you do the right thing, you'll be accepted too. You know, we do not get the impression.

At least I do not. Some people do. I didn't read in the scripture.

You do not get the impression that God is the only one concerned when it comes to individual salvation, that God grants a gift. And the person who's to whom is granted decides whether to receive the gift or not. Now, to say that God has granted salvation or granted repentance to the Gentiles.

If it was strictly unilateral on God's part, then all Gentiles would be repenting because God would have granted it to the Gentiles. But, of course, only some Gentiles repent, just like some Jews do. And therefore, I don't think we should read more into the beliefs of the early church on this from this statement than some people, than it really is saying.

It is possible, I think, to read more into it than is really implied. OK, but notice God has also granted the Gentiles repentance to life, repentance resulting in life. Repentance to life means the repentance comes before the life.

Another theological controversy. What's first, regeneration or repentance? Some say you have to be regenerated to repent. Well, when you regenerate, then you have life.

That's what regeneration is, coming from death to life. But, it doesn't say he's granted life unto repentance. That is, he brings them to life and then they can repent.

The opposite. He grants them repentance so that they can come to life. John said the same thing about faith in the Gospel of John in chapter 20, double closing verses.

He said there's many other things that Jesus did besides those things written in his book. But these are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that you might have life through believing. In other words, you come to life by believing, not the other way.

This is, frankly, the consistent way that Scripture speaks about these things. When you

believe, when you repent, there is regeneration. God regenerates.

You cannot regenerate yourself. It's God who does that. But, to whom does he do it? He does it to those who repent.

He does it to those who believe. Three times in Scripture. Once in the Old Testament, twice in the New Testament, it says God resists the proud, but he gives grace to the humble.

So, there are apparently some people who are humble and some are not. And, therefore, some to whom he will give grace and others to whom he will not. In this case, Cornelius was certainly humble.

He was a humble man for a soldier, for a man of power and influence in the Roman army. He was very meek in front of this fisherman, Peter, and before God. And so, God granted grace to him and his family and to many others after that.

Verse 19. Now, at verse 19, we're finished with the story of Cornelius and we're finished with the story of Peter at this point. There will be one more story about Peter in chapter 12.

But, between here and there, we have the story of the founding of the church in Antioch. The church in Antioch was to become the chief primary missionary sending church. In fact, it's the only church in the Book of Acts that's ever reported as ever sending out missionaries at all.

The Jerusalem church didn't send out missionaries. They scattered because of persecution. And the apostles went to check on the work that was resulting.

We don't really find any of the churches in the Book of Acts recorded sending missionaries except for the church of Antioch. It's the church that sent out Paul on his three missionary journeys. And Barnabas with him the first time, Silas with him the second time, and Mark the first time as well.

But, this church, Antioch, was in the, you know, up in Syria where Gabi is from. Have you been to Antioch? Many times. You're from Antioch? Okay, you're from Antioch.

That's cool. Antioch in these days was the third largest city in the Roman Empire only after Rome and Alexandria. Alexandria, Egypt, and Rome were the only cities in the Roman Empire bigger than Antioch.

And at this time it's estimated Antioch had at least 500,000 people, half a million people in those days. There's a lot of people in a city. And so a church was to be established there and it was to become the sending church for Paul and his companions.

And also for Barnabas and his team when on the second missionary journey Paul and

Barnabas parted company. Now, how'd that church get started? Well, we're going to read about that. It got started essentially as a result of these people who had been persecuted in Jerusalem fleeing.

You remember it says in verse 19, Now those who were scattered after the persecution arose over Stephen. Now that's kind of taken us back a few chapters, like three chapters back to chapter 8, verse 1. He's saying, remember? Remember chapter 8, verse 1? Let's pick up that story now and run another thread of that story. In chapter 8, verse 1, it says, Now Saul was consenting to Stephen's death.

At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria except for the apostles. Now there's the scattering. From that point on we've read about Philip and his activities, we've read about Peter's activities, but we haven't read about any of the other people who scattered.

Well, we're going to now. Picking it up back where we left off in chapter 8, verse 1, it says, Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, which of course is modern Lebanon, Cyprus, which as you probably know is an island in the Mediterranean, and Antioch, which was the largest city in Syria and in the region, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only. But some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who when they had come to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus.

Now I pointed out to you that the word Hellenist earlier in chapter 6 and in chapter 9 referred to Hellenistic Jews. There's a synagogue of the Hellenists, and Stephen got into trouble with the Jews by getting in debates with the Hellenists there in that synagogue. A Hellenist in that context is a person who's Greek-speaking but Jewish.

A Jewish in Palestine, in Jerusalem, there were Hellenistic and Hebrew Jews, and that would speak of the language and culture. Those who were long-term Palestinian residents for generations, they spoke Aramaic, they were Jewish in custom and culture, but there were also those of the diaspora from other countries who had come to live in Jerusalem and had their synagogues, and these people had, they were Greek-speaking. Their ancestors had lived in foreign countries, not Israel.

They spoke Greek, they had Greek customs, and these two groups seemed to get along reasonably well in Jerusalem, though they had separate synagogues. Now, therefore, in chapter 6, when Stephen was contesting with Hellenists, and in chapter 9, when Paul was doing so, those were Hellenistic Jews. Now, how do we know these aren't Hellenistic Jews? Well, for one thing, if they were Hellenistic Jews, there'd be not worth mentioning it, because there was nothing controversial, nothing even new about preaching to Hellenistic Jews.

And also, this is contrasted with those who spoke to the Jews only. Because it says in verse 19, at the end of verse 19, a lot of these people went to all these places, but they'd only speak to the Jews. And when we have the contrast in the next verse, the assumption is these ones were speaking to people who were not Jews.

Greek culture, Greek people, Greek-speaking Gentiles. And I think we have to understand that Hellenists in this context still means Greek-speaking and Greek-cultured people, but these are not Jewish ones, these are Gentile ones. And so, it's not clear, actually, whether this is after or before Peter's experience in the house of Cornelius.

Because the story about the house of Cornelius seems to have been told somewhat out of chronological order. It may well have happened before Antioch was evangelized. It probably was before that.

But since we've gone all the way back to the context of chapter 8, you know, this is before Cornelius. But how long it took them to go to all these regions and evangelize Antioch, we don't know. It's possible that the conversion of Cornelius had occurred by the time they got there and that they were bold, bold to minister to Gentiles because they heard about Cornelius' situation.

Or not, maybe not. Maybe these were... The Jews who scattered from Jerusalem under persecution were very probably Jews of the Diaspora who had been living in Jerusalem, but they had relatives and friends in other countries, so they could leave and go stay somewhere else. Not everyone in Jerusalem could just leave Jerusalem and live.

You have to have someone to live with or you have to have a job or something. And there were Jewish Christians who stayed in Jerusalem, the apostles included. But those who scattered may very well have been Jews of the Diaspora.

And if that is true, they may well have been more, let's just say, flexible about dealing with Gentiles than Peter was or than the Palestinian Jews were. We don't know. In any case, whether it's before or after Cornelius, these people began to preach to Gentiles as well as Jews.

So, it says in verse 21, And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord. So we've got lots of Gentiles coming to Christ in these different regions. Now this is in addition to those that Philip had evangelized.

He was one of those who scattered at this time, but we've already read about him in detail. We get sort of a summary of many others who aren't named for us going out, and lots of converts. Now these people were not missionaries sent out to plant churches, but that's what they ended up doing accidentally.

There were people who knew Jesus going into regions where no one knew Jesus. And of course, if you're excited about Jesus, your friends are going to find out about it. And it

turns out that these people were very ripe for conversion.

And we see this true also when Paul goes to the Gentile regions, that multitudes of Gentiles are converted. So there's really a real hunger for the reality that the gospel offers among these people. So it says a great multitudes, a great number believed and turned to the Lord.

Verse 22, then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem. Now that's what it says in chapter 8, when Philip evangelized the Samaritans, it says news of it came to the apostles in Jerusalem. Now at this point, there are so many Gentile regions that are being evangelized, and so many brush fire, spontaneous churches growing up in the Gentile world.

I think the apostles can't keep track of them all. Philip's instance in Samaria was probably one of the early ones, and Peter and John went to investigate that. We see Peter in chapter 9, going to Lydda and Joppa and Caesarea, following up on the work of Philip there.

But now we read there's a lot of these kinds of things happening, lots of places. And it's possible the apostles were going out to check on them as much as they could, but they got overwhelmed with the number of them. I mean, this thing was scattering all over the place.

It took time to travel to even check on them, much less to hear about them and keep track of them. So in this case, what happened in Antioch, news of that got back to that church in Jerusalem, and instead of an apostle going, maybe they were not available at this point to go out. Maybe they're all checking out other places.

Barnabas was sent out. And so here's where Barnabas becomes prominent. We know of Barnabas, of course, from chapter 4. He was one of the people who had sold a piece of property and given it to the apostles to distribute to the poor at the end of Acts chapter 4. Now we find him again.

Now, by the way, Eusebius, the church historian, who quoted Clement, said that Barnabas was one of the 70 that Jesus sent out in Luke chapter 10. You may remember in Luke chapter 9, Jesus sent out the 12 two by two on a short-term mission. Then in the next chapter, Luke chapter 10, he sent out 70 on a short-term mission, two by two.

According to Clement of Rome and the historian Eusebius, who wrote in the early 4th century around 325, Barnabas was one of the 70. So he had been around for a long time. Now, he wasn't one of the ones that was a candidate to replace Judas in chapter 1. Remember, in chapter 1, Peter said, of those who've been with us from the baptism of John, all the time until the Lord was taken up, we must find someone to replace Judas.

So Elias and one other candidate, Justice, was selected. So Barnabas apparently was not

even considered for that, but he may not have been around at the baptism of John. We don't know when he joined Jesus' entourage, but at least sometime during Jesus' ministry, perhaps not as early as the baptism of John.

Barnabas was now becoming an experienced witness, even while Jesus was still on earth. And he was therefore one of the very early Christians in Jerusalem. And the apostles are the ones who named him Barnabas.

His real name was Joseph, but the apostles gave him the nickname Barnabas, which means son of consolation, which tells us something of what they thought of him. They looked up to him. They trusted him.

Later on, in chapter 14, he's going to be referred to as an apostle, but he's not one of the 12. But when he and Paul were sent out on the first missionary journey, from that point on, they are called apostles together. At this point, Saul or Paul is not really in the picture.

We read of his conversion in chapter 9. And after three years, he had gone to visit Jerusalem. He was there for two weeks. He got into trouble.

There was a plot against his life. So the disciples sent him off to Tarsus, his hometown in Cilicia. We've heard nothing about Saul since then.

That was in chapter 9. But now we're going to find that Barnabas thinks he can use Saul as a team player in Antioch, as we'll see. Let's just read this. The news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch.

When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord. For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and great many people were added to the Lord. Now, Barnabas is the only man in the book of Acts who's called a good man.

There are many people who are commended in the book of Acts for their virtues. The only time Luke refers to a person as a good man is Barnabas in this case. And he is also said to be full of the Holy Spirit and faith, which is also what was said about Stephen back in chapter 6 and verse 5. In Acts 6, 5, Stephen was said to be full of faith and of the Holy Spirit.

And we read that Barnabas was not only a nice guy, trusted by the apostles to go and be deputized, to go and check on these brush fire movements to see if they're okay or not. He was also a good evangelist apparently because many people were added to the Lord through his presence there in Antioch. Now, there's a good chance that Barnabas, when he came to Antioch, was the senior member of the church as he settled there.

Because again, he had been around even in the days of the ministry of Jesus. Most of these people in the church in Jerusalem got saved after Pentecost. Remember, there were only 120 of them in the upper room on Pentecost.

Probably Barnabas was one of those. But most of these people probably had been converted among the thousands who were converted after that in Jerusalem. So he would have been like, he would have been like, you know, the most experienced, the most respected Christian in that church at that time.

And it says, then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. Because we had heard, of course, back at chapter 9, verse 30, that that's where Saul had gone. This was now at least 10 years later.

So Acts has passed over at least 10 years of Saul's life. How do we know this? Because in Galatians chapters 1 and 2, Paul gives us something of his autobiography of this very period of time. He tells us that his visit to Jerusalem, of which we read in chapter 9, occurred three years after his conversion.

He makes that very plain in Galatians chapter 1, verse 21. After three years after his conversion, he went to Jerusalem. That was the last we've heard of him in Acts.

He was in Jerusalem, and then he fled there after two weeks to go to Tarsus. He's been there all the time since. But now, Barnabas is going to bring him from Tarsus to Antioch, and within a year, they're going to go to Jerusalem again.

And Paul mentions that second trip to Jerusalem as being apparently 11 years after the previous one. Actually, the way it's worded in Galatians 2, 1, he says, then after 14 years, I went again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, which we're going to read about in this chapter. Paul says, after 14 years.

I think most commentators believe that this is 14 years after his conversion, which would be 11 years after the previous story, because that had happened three years after his conversion. So about a decade has passed. He's going to spend another year in Antioch, then he's going to Jerusalem.

That would be that second visit that he mentions in Galatians chapter 2. But Barnabas has not seen Saul, apparently, for 10 years. But it was Barnabas, remember, who had introduced Paul to the other apostles when they were afraid to meet him. Back in chapter 9, when Paul first came from Damascus to Jerusalem, it says he tried to join himself to the disciples, but they were afraid of him, not believing that he was really a disciple.

Then it says Barnabas came and introduced him. So Barnabas and he had become friends. Barnabas trusted him early on.

And apparently, even though they'd only spent two weeks together in Jerusalem, in their whole lives at this point, in that two weeks, Saul must have made a profound impression on Barnabas and convinced him, I think this man is the man we need here in Antioch. So he goes looking for Saul in Tarsus and he finds him. And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch so it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people.

And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. In the Greek, Christianos is actually a Latin form, Christian. In the English, you know, Anglicized version, we say Christian.

That's the name of Christ, obviously, with three letters I-A-N after it. We have other examples that notably the Herodians in the New Testament. The Herodians were followers of Herod.

Apparently, adding that suffix to a name means you're a follower of that person. So the disciples came to be called Christians, followers of Christ in Antioch. There are many who believe that this name was chosen for them by others than themselves and that it might have even been intended as a derisive term.

Hard to say. It might not have been. We're not told that.

A lot of preachers say, you know, a criticism, that was an insult that the heathens gave them. Well, that's possible. That is possible.

The Bible doesn't really confirm that. The Christians may have simply started calling themselves that. In any case, the Christians didn't use that term very much in the rest of the Bible.

The word Christian only appears two other times in the Bible. Once is in the lips of King Agrippa. In chapter 26, when Paul is giving his testimony before Agrippa, Agrippa says to him in chapter 26 and verse 28, Paul, almost thou persuaded me to become a Christian.

Now, he might have used that term even if Christian was seen as a derisive term for the followers of Christ. He might have been kind of using it derisively. Another time that the word Christian appears is in 1 Peter 4, 16.

And Peter says, none of you should be suffering as evildoers or criminals. But if anyone suffers for being a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God on his behalf. Suffering for being a Christian.

It's possible that Peter is embracing the word Christian or that he's saying that those who persecute them call them Christians. That's the term that's been used in persecuting them. It doesn't matter.

It's a name that stuck in later centuries. And it is now, of course, the term that we most often use. What was used of them before that? Disciples.

Indeed. Indeed. Verse 26, the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.

Now, there are some other names for the believers earlier. Sometimes they're called the believers. Sometimes they're called the saints.

And there's a few other words. But disciples is the most common name. And Luke says at this point, at least in Antioch, the name disciple seems to have been replaced by the word Christian.

What that means, then, is that when we use the word Christian, if we're using it in a biblical sense, we're using a word that means disciple. Because these are the same people who are always called disciples until someone gave them this new name, Christian. They're the same people.

What made them Christians is that they were disciples. And therefore, when we say, are you a Christian? We're actually asking, are you a disciple of Jesus? Because that's the meaning of the word biblically. Of course, the word has taken on lots of other meanings since then.

I mean, in some societies, if you say somebody's not a Christian, even if they don't profess to be one, they'll be insulted because they think Christian just means a decent person. They'll be called twice the Christian that that person is when they're not even Christian at all. They're saying, I'm a good person.

Today, we would normally say a person is a Christian if they've followed certain protocols to join a Christian church of some kind. Maybe they said a sinner's prayer and got baptized. Maybe they went forward at an altar call.

There's all kinds of... In different groups, there's different protocols. And if someone just jumps through those hoops, we seem to allow them to be called a Christian whether there's any evidence or not that they're really a disciple. Well, what's a disciple then? I remember during the Jesus movement in the 70s and another leader in the movement with myself, and I had lots of conversations about this because we were very fascinated with the concept of discipleship because Jesus spoke about it a great deal.

And as we read what Jesus said about disciples, it made us wonder. I remember this brother and I were talking once saying, do you think all Christians are disciples? And the reason we wondered is because when Jesus described disciples, that was not describing most of the people we knew who called themselves Christians. And so we thought, well, maybe there's two kinds of Christians, the kinds that are disciples and the kinds that are not disciples.

Sort of like the general troops and the shock troops, you know, the general army and the special forces. The disciples are the really committed ones and the rest are just the lazy, pew-warming believers. And that's basically what I think we realized, that although most of the Christians in churches that we knew did not really fit the description Jesus gave of disciples, we didn't want to be uncharitable and say they can't be called Christians.

After all, they apparently believe something about Christianity and therefore I guess we don't want to not call them Christians. That seems too judgmental. But actually the question is, would Jesus call them Christians? That's what we didn't know.

Remember Jesus said in Matthew 7, not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that does the will of my Father in heaven. There's a lot of people who call him Lord, but because they aren't doing the will of the Father in heaven, Jesus said, I'm going to say to them, I never knew you. And not everyone's going to enter the kingdom who says Lord to Jesus.

But if you want to look at a really, I should say, definitive description of what a disciple is, look at Luke 14. Because again, according to Acts, this is what a Christian is. In Luke 14, beginning at verse 25, it says, a great multitude went with Jesus and he turned and said to them, if anyone comes to me, does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.

Next verse, and whoever does not bear his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. For which of you intending to build a tower does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it. Lest after he has laid the foundation and is not able to finish it, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, this man began to build and was not able to finish.

Or what king going to make war against another king does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with 10,000 to meet him who comes against him with 20,000. Or else while the other king is not ready off, he sends a delegation and makes conditions of peace. So likewise, verse 33, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be my disciple.

Now there's three verses in that section that all end with the words cannot be my disciple. And if the disciples are what we're called Christians in the Bible, then we could render that cannot be a Christian. Well, who can't be a Christian? Well, if anyone comes to me, verse 26, and does not hate his father, can't be a disciple.

If a person doesn't take up his cross and follow, he can't be a disciple. Verse 33, if you don't forsake all that you have, you can't be a disciple. Now you might say, well, I don't think I know any disciples.

I don't think I know any Christians. Actually, I think it was Nietzsche, if I'm not mistaken,

the atheist who said the only Christian ever lived died on a cross. He basically believed that no one could be a Christian, whether that's true or not.

I don't know what the Christians were like. I know some Christians. I'm a Christian.

You're a Christian, I assume. But what does it mean? Do you hate your mother and your father, wife and children? Of course, we have to understand the Hebraisms that Jesus used with his Hebrew disciples. They understood very well.

Hate in this connection means to give less preference to. Where he says, he that loves father and mother more than me is not worthy. He who loves wife and children more than me is not worthy.

That's what it means. The idiom that Jesus used when he said you have to hate them. It doesn't mean you have to really hate them.

It means you have to love them less than you love him. He has to be a higher priority to you than your family members or even than your own life also. And that's why when you take up a cross, your life is your priority.

You take up a cross because you're going to die. And you do it on purpose. Many people were crucified in the Roman world, not voluntarily.

The Romans, you know, overwhelmed them with power and took them off and killed them though they didn't want to. But nobody ever carried a cross other than voluntarily. The Romans required condemned people to carry their cross.

But what if you didn't do it? I mean, they're going to die. You're going to die in a few minutes. I mean, you could rebel.

The person who said, OK, I'll carry it was a person who had resigned himself to death, a person who's willing to die. And in the case of Christians, not only willing to die if necessary as martyrs, but even to die to the things of this world, die to our own flesh and our own desires, taking up our cross. If you don't do that, you can't be a disciple, Jesus said.

And when he said in verse 33, what does that mean? Are we supposed to all be poverty stricken? Should we all go home from this cruise and sell everything we have in a yard sale and stand out naked on a street corner and say, OK, God, I guess I'm a disciple now. What do you want me to do? He'll probably say, you better go buy some clothes, buy some furniture and buy some cooking utensils and move into a house, you know. Well, then what does it mean to forsake all that you have? You've been bought with a price and you are not your own.

As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6, verse 20, I think it is, 19 or 20, he says, you're not your

own, you've been bought with a price. Well, if you've been bought, then you don't own yourself or anything else. When a man was sold into slavery, he was the property of his master and everything he owned was his master's.

But that doesn't mean he had no more dealings with things over them. Potiphar bought Joseph and Joseph was a slave. He owned nothing, but he managed all of Potiphar's property.

And therefore, Joseph would have looked to most people like a rich man. He probably dressed well, slept well, ate well and handled a lot of money. It just wasn't his.

It was his owner's. And that's how it is if you're a disciple. You've signed over your life, it all is his now.

You've forsaken it in the sense that you've turned it over. How do I know that it means that? Because Peter, when Jesus said to the rich young ruler to sell what he had and give to the poor, Peter said, well, Lord, what shall we have? We have forsaken everything. Same expression.

We have forsaken everything and followed you. And Jesus took it for granted that that was true. Peter still owned a house.

He still owned a fishing boat. It's his now. His home was Christ's home.

His boat was Jesus's boat. Everything he had was accessible to Christ and belonged to Christ. He was just managing it for him.

And that's how it is when you become a disciple. That's how it is when you become a Christian. That's why the early church said no one said that the things he possessed was his own, because it was all Christ's.

Early Christianity was total sold out to Christness. That's what it says in the Bible. And no other passage redefines it in any other way.

Full commitment. And, of course, that only makes sense. If Jesus really is who he's supposed to be, then nothing else matters.

What could matter more? What could matter even as much as knowing the Son of God who gives eternal life? What is there in this world to distract from that? What is there in the world to do that? What would it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul, Jesus says? What will a man give in exchange for his soul? Your soul is worth more than everything else you have. And Christ, if he is real, and he certainly is, to forsake all to be his disciple and to find life, that is not a hard saying of Jesus. These things are sometimes called the hard sayings of Jesus.

What's hard about it? To wait for something that you can't lose? That sounds like a

bargain to me. Follow Jesus. Everything else becomes his.

That's what the early Christians were. Those are the ones who were first called Christians, the disciples. Now, quickly here, a few verses more.

And when he had found him, let's see, verse 27, And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. Then one of them named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar. Now, all the world is a term that Luke uses to mean the whole Roman Empire, the whole Roman world.

He uses that expression in Luke chapter 2 where he says in the days of Caesar Augustus a decree went out that all the world should be registered for taxation. The Roman world. Caesar was all the world had to be taxed, meant all the Roman Empire.

That's the way they spoke back then. So to say there's going to be a famine that will take in all the world would mean only the Roman Empire. Now, we have a little problem because there's no recorded famine that was empire wide in the reign of Claudius.

There were, however, several famines that are known to have occurred in the Roman Empire. Vladimir, happened in 46 A.D., which was well within Claudius' reign. And it's that famine in Judea.

By the way, the fact that we don't have any record of such famine doesn't mean it didn't happen. Not everything that ever happened is on record. And all I say is we don't have any secular records about such a famine throughout the whole Roman Empire.

But we do have records of many serious famines in various places, including Judea. And it's that one that called forth the action we read of next. Because it says, then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea.

This they also did and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul. Now, this was Paul's second trip after his conversion to Jerusalem. The one he writes about in Galatians chapter 2. They apparently believed that since the famine was coming, the Judeans would have to store up some food while food was available.

So they took up a financial offering and sent the money to Jerusalem. If they were in the midst of the famine, it wouldn't help. They can't eat money.

If there's no food, you can't buy food. But this was, the famine had not yet come. And therefore, I think they thought if we give them enough money, they can store up some food.

Then when the famine comes, they can make it through. So this was their reasoning.

And they sent Paul and Barnabas or Saul, as he was still called at this point, and Barnabas down to, down to Jerusalem to carry it.

Now, I said Saul and Barnabas. At this point, the order is still Barnabas and Saul. The last words in this chapter are Barnabas and Saul.

We will find as the, when we get to chapter 13 and they go on their first missionary journey, initially, it's Barnabas and Saul. But very shortly into the journey, it starts being Saul and Barnabas because Barnabas, I'm sure he had no problem with Paul doing this, but Barnabas kind of took a back seat and Paul became the main spokesman and did most of the miracles and so forth. So Paul became kind of the leader of the team, though initially, Barnabas certainly had seniority over Paul.

Barnabas had been saved since the earliest days. Paul was still relatively new Christian. But they carried the money down to Jerusalem and gave it to the elders there so that they could do whatever they wanted to do with it for the upcoming famine.

We read of no other activity of their presence in Jerusalem on this occasion, though, of course, Paul tells us in Galatians 2 that on that occasion, there were some false brethren, according to Paul, who were Judaizers, circumcision party members who tried to persuade Titus, who happened to be with them, also to be circumcised, who was a Gentile. And Paul said, I stood up to them, I wouldn't give in for a moment to those guys, lest the integrity of the gospel should be compromised. So there was a bit of a challenge to Paul and Barnabas about the circumcision issue by some in the circumcision party in Jerusalem on this occasion.

Luke doesn't mention it here. We just read, in fact, of them taking the money on this occasion down to Jerusalem. Then we don't read about them again until chapter 12, verse 25, which says, and Barnabas and Saul, returning from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry, and they also took with them John whose surname was Mark.

Mark was a Jerusalem Christian who went back to Antioch with them after this charity trip that they made. In between those verses, the last verse of chapter 11 and the last verse of chapter 12, we have another story about Peter, and the last one we're going to have in Acts. It's a good one.

It has some features in it that are confirmed from outside historical sources. Some of the places where Luke's history actually parallels some of the histories from other writers who are not Christians is there. Of course, that does that from time to time.

That always helps us to realize that Luke is not making this stuff up. He's writing real history. And so, next time, tomorrow, we will take chapter 12.