

## ACTS 11 OPEN THE FLOOD GATES!

### Prologue

Peter returns with some amazing news, the gospel was opened up to the Gentiles without condition or need to be to be first converted to Judaism.

He patiently, humbly explains every detail to the apostles as they contend with him.

With something happens, a stirring of truth resonates in their hearts as Peter patiently shares his story.

We pan over to Antioch, where something amazing happens as a result of the Lord opening the doors wide open to all of the world to receive the gospel message.

### Intro

Acts 1 initial command (revive HS, GO!) had a slow start...his witness Jerusalem Samaria...uttermost parts... The apostles in the 1st 9 chapters some dozen years or so, spent all of their time preaching in Israel within the bounds of Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria.

It took a while to get going, for the ministry to really take flight and grow wings that spanned beyond the borders of Israel into the farthest parts of the Roman world. In fact it took more than time, it even took persecution. Don't down the apostles for this. Don't think evidence in Bible stating they were in sin for taking 12 to 13 years to move out of Jerusalem & Samaria... the leadership, the family the church was growing super tight and knit together during this time.

God used the persecution and killing of Stephen to move the church out from their home base even further, and to fulfill the command Jesus had given to go and preach the gospel...

In acts 10 we saw a shift in the witness ministry. There was a turning point. As if the latches of the gates of the world were lifted. The knob on the door was twisted...but not swung open yet.

Here in Acts 11 we are going to see the floodgates door actually bursting open...for in the second half of the chapter things really get rolling.

But it couldn't roll until one essential issue, one certain road block was settled. There was a man made determination, steeped in tradition, that if the Gentiles were to come into the kingdom of God it had to be through the law first. For the Jewish believer, they all started with conception that a Gentile 1st had to become a Jew, become circumcised, come through Moses law, follow dietary regulations, there were strict ceremonial requirements, they had to be a follower of Moses first & only *then* they could enter into the kingdom of life through Jesus & become a Christian..

End of Acts 10 God clearly showed that people could come straight to Jesus, the door was open to them...just had to repent and believe. Cornelius, his household, and his crew were prime examples. There was an outpouring of HS on gentiles while Peter preached the word to these non Jews, Gentiles were baptised into the same family of believers as Peter, John, James, Barnabas, Paul even. God was not holding the Gentiles to the former laws and commands.

The Jew and Gentile were to be one body, not two separate bodies of Jew and Gentile. Like the sheet in Peter's vision... All the meat, both clean and unclean alike were sitting side by side on that table cloth let down from heaven... A picture of the church that doesn't discriminate because of race, color, background, or differences. One thing Peter learned is that all people are unclean before the Lord, Jesus alone can make a person clean.

You could say, it was over for Peter, the matter was settled, he saw that God had opened the door to Gentiles, despite whatever cultural biased he may have had previously. A mark of a true disciple of Jesus is someone willing to have their mind changed & see other people like Jesus sees them. The rest of the body of believers were nearly 100% Jewish practicing believers in Jesus, including the apostles.... The Lord had some work to do on *their* hearts, and because of Peter's willingness to be altered by his Jesus collision.... God was able to use Peter to share an earth shattering message to the rest of the believing Jewish community!!! The question is, will they be willing to hear it and be changed? Or will they resist in pride and reject the leading of the Lord, just like the Pharisees did?

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1 Now the apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. 2 And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him, 3 saying, "You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!"

News travels fast, word got back to the apostles that the word of God had hit the home of the Gentiles, the HS had been poured out upon the house of Corn... & also that Peter had eaten with unclean Gentile.

Peter walks into a bit of a firestorm when he returns with amazing news, for it says they contended with Peter. Who? Those of the circumcision. Speaking of the believers in Christ that were of the Jewish background, which was nearly every single believer at this time. Specifically it says "the apostles contended with Peter". So glad for grace, there is no record or mention of the names of these apostles who contended with Peter.

Never a command to not eat...Peter broke no command, but traditions and customs. Strong ones... You went into uncircumcised men and ate with them...

They were much more concerned with what *Peter did* than what the *Lord was doing* with the gentiles. But...Eating with someone had a particular sense of fellowship and oneness in Bible times, for you would take a single loaf of bread, life revolved around bread, pass the loaf of bread around, break off a chunk, pass it to the person sitting next to you, they would eat from the same loaf as you. It was very symbolic & intimate, sharing a meal was more than eating and drinking. It was saying we are one together. The fact that Peter would eat with unclean Gentiles had the apostles in a tizzy!

Isn't that the way things go with religion and rules. The Jewish nation was supposed to be a chosen vessel that God would use to bring the message of hope to the world. Isaiah 49.6 "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth."

Yet ceremonies, self righteous traditions, prideful thinking had caused the Jewish people to shrink away from the world in fear and disgust. Even though the apostles were now saved by grace it would take some undoing of the Lord for them to loosen their grip to 1000's years of pride and tradition. Not all traditions are bad...

4 But Peter explained it to them in order from the beginning, saying: 5 "I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, an object descending like a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came to me. 6 When I observed it intently and considered, I saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. 7 And I heard a voice saying to me, 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat.' 8 But I said, 'Not so, Lord! For nothing common or unclean has at any

time entered my mouth.’ 9 But the voice answered me again from heaven, ‘What God has cleansed you must not call common.’ 10 Now this was done three times, and all were drawn up again into heaven. 11 At that very moment, three men stood before the house where I was, having been sent to me from Caesarea. 12 Then the Spirit told me to go with them, doubting nothing. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered the man’s house. 13 And he told us how he had seen an angel standing in his house, who said to him, ‘Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter, 14 who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved.’ 15 And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning.

Peter did not flaunt his apostolic authority. Instead he began with a humble recitation of what happened at Cornelius’ house. The Greek makes this very clear. It tells us that Peter began at the beginning and explained everything **precisely** – a very strong word – as it happened.

Notice this is the 3rd time the HS, through the pen of Luke, tells us this. God speaks in stereo listen up, when He tells us 3 times, it’s important! There is a basic premiss that God doesn't repeat Himself unnecessarily!

A few details given here not in ch 10.

vs 5 Sheet from heaven came right down to **where he was**. vs6. He spoke of **observing** it intently. Vs 12 Peter adds that **6 men** came with him.(wisdom of accountability) . And in vs 14 we told that the angel informed Cornelius that Peter would come and tell him words that he and his whole household **would be saved by**. (CG questions, was he saved?) Best commentary on bible..

Peter knew this vision not about food but people. 10.28 **God has shown me that I should not call any man unclean** God is willing to bring his gospel to all men directly! And what God calls clean, we should also.

Peter was careful to add that before he ever entered the man’s house, an angel had been standing in his house. If it was permitted for an angel of God to go into Cornelius’ house, it must be permitted for Peter also.

15 And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning.

Peter goes on to tell the apostles and brethren that as he shared Jesus with Cornelius and company something awesome happened...The Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning!

This conclusion was important. It showed that God’s stamp of approval was on this work towards the Gentiles. Peter’s point to these Christian Jews was clear: they could not withhold their acceptance when God had given His.

Quick to judge?

16 Then I remembered **the word of the Lord**, how He said, ‘John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ 17 If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?”

18 When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, “Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.”

Peter is sharing all this with the apostles almost in disbelief himself, as if it's almost too much for him to handle himself. You get the sense that Peter is preaching to himself here. He tells them how things played out step by step, trying to explain that this was a God thing not a Peter thing.

?We can ask ourselves..How do you know a thing is from the Lord or from somewhere else? We can mishear, misunderstand, or make things up! The enemy will use anything he can to distract and destroy.

Peter's soft evidence...I had a **vision** from the Lord (well, Satan is the master of disguises), Cornelius saw an **angel** (Satan can appear as an angel of light **2 Corinth 11.14** for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.), right when the vision was over the 3 guys were knocking at my door calling me to come, (**coincidence** is not always evidence of a God occurrence!), the **HS spoke** to me, (we're getting somewhere, but I have doubts whether it's the HS or my own mind sometimes), the **HS fell** upon them, ( it's starting to get conclusive) but what came next in vs 16 is the slam dunk, smokin' gun evidence that will close the case once and for all! The one two punch!

**16 Then I remembered the word of the Lord,** how He said, 'John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be **baptized with the Holy Spirit.**'

There is no evidence more convincing, there is no other place that we should go for an absolute truth than the word of God, the bible, the words of Jesus, written in script by the prompting and leading of the HS himself. If you're ever unsure (I'm often unsure in and of myself), if you're not quite clear on any matter, go to the word, Bible. How can you be sure of anything? **2 Timothy 3:16** All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, **17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped** for every good work.

If a vision, angel, feeling, or leading, or counsel from friends contradicts the word...trash it, toss it, tank it!

There are many today who look at some work or another and say, "Look what God is doing." But **activity alone isn't enough to validate a work of God.** It must also be in line with God's Word. This work among the Gentiles passed both tests.

**17 If therefore God gave them** the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?"

Peter, admits he had his reservations about bringing the gospel direct to the gentiles, but who was he to stand against God? God gave this important message to Peter, the apostles, to me...and to YOU! He gave it to share, to go out into our world and share this message of hope that we've been trusted with to share and not keep to ourselves. In it's pride religion had taken a wrong turn, the Jews had kept the word of God to themselves, and viewed the rest of the world as unclean people to be kept at a safe distance.

God has called us to get into the trenches with the most detestable creatures on the planet....other people! Mistry is something we are all called to, not just a pastor or preacher. How can we serve mankind if we are unwilling to go to them where they are at?

**18 When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, "Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life."**

The contending & arguing came to a screeching halt. Ever been in a room with a lot of commosion and possibly some loud contending going on? If the whole crowd suddenly goes silent, you know something big just happened!

They became silent: The Jewish believers in Jerusalem (those of the circumcision, Acts 11:2) reacted with a stunned silence when Peter shared with them the slammed dunk evidence. They now could see that God truly had led this Gentile encounter, it was all Jesus.

There are moments in life that shape and define a situation, often called a turning point. In football it can be when there is a possession change, like in SB51 when Hightower strip sacked Matt Ryan and forced a fumble that changed the course of SB history. The Patriots went on to win the SB, many say this fumble recovery was the turning point. Here was a personal turning point for the Jewish Christians they were faced with a decision: to accept that God was opening the door to Gentiles, or rely on tradition that said you must first become a Jew to gain entrance God...

But then they glorified God, because they saw He was now at work among the Gentiles, they got it, it clicked, they chose to accept that the Lord was at work here.

This is a powerful passage, demonstrating that the **hearts of the Jewish Christians** in Jerusalem were **soft enough** to be guided and corrected by God. It is an awesome thing when God's people will allow their prejudices and traditions to be overcome by God's Word and God's work.

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## Antioch

Luke now turns our attention to a very related incident from another light. If Peter and the apostles accepting God's open door to the Gentiles is a close up view, we are now zooming out to get a look at how this open door to the gentiles influenced the movement of the church, beginning in an unlikely place, Antioch.

Antioch was a city in Syria, or Antioch on the Orontes, was a thriving city located some 300 miles north of Jerusalem in the southernmost part of modern day Turkey. A city of half a million people and was the third greatest city in Roman Empire. 1st Rome, 2nd Alexandria. "The Queen of the east" "Antioch the Beautiful"

One might say that Jerusalem was all about religion; Rome was all about power; Alexandria was all about intellect, and Athens was all about philosophy. Adding to that, one might say that Antioch was all about business and immorality.

It was known best for its business, commerce, sophistication, and culture..but mostly for its immorality! They were known for worship of Daphne a goddess seduced by other Greek Gods, they honored Daphne by making prostitution legal and an act of worship.

In contrast to the earlier account...When the Gospel came to Cornelius and he became a follower of Jesus, it came to a man who was already a God-fearer. He had a respect for the God of Israel and lived a moral life. When it came to Antioch, it came to an utterly pagan city.

19 Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only.

The church had been scattered because of persecution of Stephen, and ironically outside of Israel, the call to go into the uttermost parts of the earth was beginning to take shape. **Phoenicia** was in North Mediterranean, in modern Lebanon coast including Tyre and Sidon. **Cyprus** and island south of

modern Turkey that you can see from Phoenicia. **Cyrene** a port city far away in N africa, Libya. The gospel was getting out there... However, they preached only to the Jews up to this point.

20 **But** some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the **Hellenists**, preaching the Lord Jesus.

**Hellenist by definition...** a person living in Hellenistic times who was Greek in language, outlook, and way of life but was not Greek in ancestry; especially :a hellenized Jew. 2 :a specialist in the language or culture of ancient Greece.

There are some commentaries on this line that say the folks being evangelized here are actually Jews who settled in Antioch due to persecution, who spoke Greek and acted Greek but still identified as a Jew.

Some believe as I do that this term refers to non-Jews, pagans, unchurched immoral people devoid of the fear of God... vs 19 only the Jews, BUT some from Cyprus and Cyrene spoke to eh Hellenist preaching Jesus...

The implication is this, these unnamed men from Cyprus and Cyrene preached Jesus to Gentiles publicly, corporately, they didn't hold back the gospel for just the elite and circumcised!

I find it so encouraging and you should too, that the men who began the explosive worldwide movement of the gospel are not even named!

God has a place and a plan for every believer, and every believer is called to share Jesus with the ones God brings to them!

21 And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.

And the hand of the Lord was with them: Because **God was with them**, their ministry was blessed and multiplied, the result was that a great number believed and turned to the Lord.

It's been said... A ministry can't turn people to the Lord unless the hand of the Lord is with them.

- You can turn people to a **personality** without the hand of the Lord.
- You can turn people to a **social club** without the hand of the Lord.
- You can turn people to a **church** or an institution without the hand of the Lord.
- But you can't turn people **to the Lord** without the hand of the Lord.

22 Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch. 23 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. 24 For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord.

The mother church in Jerusalem caught wind of what was happening in Antioch and they got behind the movement by sending Barnabas, the great encourager. He encouraged them all that they should **continue with the Lord**: Barnabas rightly focused on his main job as a leader of the congregation. He **strengthened the church family itself**, with the result that a great many people were added to the Lord.

This is the plan for **church growth** spoken of in Ephesians 4:11-16.11 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the **equipping of the saints** for the **work of ministry**, for the edifying of the body of Christ, 13 till we all come to

the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; 14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, 15 but, **speaking the truth in love**, may **grow up** in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

Leaders in the church dedicate themselves to building strong, healthy Christians. As the saints are equipped for the work of the ministry, they grow into maturity, and do their ministry, and it causes growth of the body.

25 Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to **seek** Saul. 26 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.

It's not difficult to think of Barnabas being exhausted and overwhelmed by all the work and opportunities in Antioch, and then remembering Saul of Tarsus.

Until this point Saul, Paul had been in his hometown for over a decade. The last we saw him he was being let down a stone wall in a basket to avoid being killed. Barnabas, the one who encouraged Paul, the one who stood by Paul's side would be the one to seek after Paul.

The word for seek here is a strong greek word, **Anezekio** Search high and low...**Luke 2** Joseph and Mary searching for Jesus... A parent frantically, energetically searching for their lost child. Barnabas the encourager....searches high and low for Saul. Determined. He knew, **Paul had a heart for Lord, a mind dedicated to studying the scriptures.**

For a year Paul and Barnabas preach, teach, and lift up the church in Antioch, bringing the church family together, making them strong.

In all this Antioch because it was a center for great teaching and preaching. Antioch "had the greatest preachers – in the first century Barnabas, Paul, and Peter; in the second Ignatius and Theophilus; in the third and fourth Lucian, Theodore, Chrysostom, and Theodoret." (Hughes)

But it also had great **informal preaching**, which is often the best kind. Acts 11:20 reminds us that they spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus to the regular people people in the street, people they would meet at the local coffee shop, at their work place, on the sports fields. This combination of great formal teaching/preaching and great **informal teaching/preaching** made the church community in Antioch something special and world-impacting. The informal preaching is a direct reference to the non pulpit sitting saints, anyone who was not the pastor of the church.

The gifts of the Spirit were being used by all the church body, church members if you will. The church in Antioch was firing on all cylinders!

My prayer, that this church would be functioning in the same way as this church in Antioch.

**The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch:** It wasn't until these years at the Church in Syrian Antioch that the name Christian became associated with the followers of Jesus.

- They had been called disciples (Acts 1:15)
- They had been called saints (Acts 9:13)
- They had been called believers (Acts 5:14)

- They had been called brothers (Acts 6:3)
- They had been called witnesses (Acts 5:32)
- They had been called followers of the Way (Acts 9:2)
- They would be called Nazarenes (Acts 24:5)
- Now they would be called Christians

In Latin, the ending **ian** meant “**the party of.**” A Christ-ian was “of the party of Jesus.” Christians was sort of like saying “Jesus-ites,” or “Jesus People,” describing the people associated with Jesus Christ. If you were a follower of Caesar Caesarian.

In today’s day and age it seems like people can get so caught up in political parties. There’s so many now, Rep, Dem, Independent, liberal, conservative, there’s even the “Rent to Dang High Party” (Jimmy McMillan ran for NY governor ), The New York Post reported that 2% of Texan voters support Harambe Party– a dead gorilla....

We as Christians must always remember who we are identified with and by. Our identity should always fall on the one we follow, and if the one we follow has any other name than Jesus, can we really call ourselves a Christ-ian?

“Ironside says that when he was traveling in China years ago he was frequently introduced as ‘Yasu-yan.’ At first he did not know what the word meant, but he asked about it and learned that Yasu was the Cantonese word for Jesus, and yan was ‘man.’ So he was being introduced as a ‘Jesus man.

That’s how I want people to classify me, the party of Jesus, all for Christ, a man or woman if you are one, that is like His Maker, a chip off the old ROCK!

early church historian, described a believer named Sanctus from Lyons, France, who was tortured for Jesus. As they tortured him cruelly, they hoped to get him to say something evil or blasphemous. They asked his name, and he only replied, “I am a Christian.” “What nation do you belong to?” He answered, “I am a Christian.” “What city do you live in?” “I am a Christian.” His questioners began to get angry: “Are you a slave or a free man?” “I am a Christian” was his only reply. No matter what they asked about him, he only answered, “I am a Christian.” This made his torturers all the more determined to break him, but they could not, and he **died with the words “I am a Christian” on his lips.**

27 And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 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. 29 Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. 30 This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

There are numerous non-Christian historians including Josephus, that give credit to this account. For there was a historical famine that struck Israel and the Roman world after this prophecy. How the Antioch disciples, Christians responded was incredible.

This foreign group of folks in Antioch gave generously to the church in Jerusalem, before the famine hit, for they believed there would be a need, they believed God’s word through Agabus the prophet.

As far as I know, this is the first charitable act of this nature in all recorded history – one race of people collecting money to help another people. No wonder they were first called Christians at Antioch.

Then the disciples sent relief: You can tell these were truly disciples and Christians, because they gave generously to meet the need. They gave, each according to his ability. They were probably truly grateful for the sending of Barnabas and Paul, serving them, teaching them, building them up in the Lord for the last year. Generosity is a direct response to the love of Christ.

Notice, that although Antioch became the gospel central, the central hub of missions to the Gentiles throughout the known world, the church at Antioch maintained **a close relationship with the church in Jerusalem.**

This is the same heart, biblical example of what will be happening here as we set out to plant a church in Yarmouth, there will be great effort and intentionality at staying a tight knit family, bound together by cords of love, on mission with Jesus together on Cape Cod.

30 This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

How fitting, that the God of grace we serve would choose Paul, the man whose very hands had set out to persecute and kill Christians, the man whose persecution sent the gospel outside of Israel, the man who was in apparent obscurity for 12 years, the man who helped launch one of the most influential and critical church plants in history, would be the one to walk with Barnabas, the great encourager, back to Jerusalem to bring gifts and love offerings of support for the church in Jerusalem!

Antioch would become the epicenter for missions for all the world. Paul would begin some of his journeys from Antioch, would get support from Antioch, and pass through the pagan city bringing the gospel to all the world.

An unlikely place, for the gospel to launch from....reminds me a place called Cape Cod!