Acts Chapter 11: The Gospel to the Gentiles Continues

Change is hard for people to embrace, you are used to doing it a certain way, we want to keep things the same as they always have been. Tradition is a powerful force, in our lives, and that is one of the issues here in Chapter 11 of Acts. The idea of Gentiles, non Jews, being part of the Kingdom of God, broke the standard way of thinking and understanding scripture. The Kingdom of God, belonged to the throne of David, a Jew and an Israelite. This did not include the Gentiles, they would be subject to this throne, not a part of it.

The New Covenant clearly stated it was for Israel and Judah, there was no mention of the Gentiles. The change began in Acts 10, with Cornelius and Peter, word had spread about the event and here, Peter is going to report about it to the brothers in Jerusalem.

Peter Defends God's Grace

Acts 11:1-30
1 Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God.
2 So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying,
3 "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them."

Apostles and the brothers: Word spread fast about the events in Caesarea, how a "Roman Legion" and his family were saved. How they spoke in tongues, it was revolutionary, unheard of. There were stories how Peter and other Jews sat down and ate forbidden food in a pagan gentiles house, what was happening? Had Peter lost his mind? At least that is what some of the Jewish believers in Jerusalem were thinking. God has a way of surprising us by including people we would never have included. Even while Jesus was on the cross, one of the two thieves was promised "Paradise", or the Samaritan woman with 6 husbands were all events out of the scope of our vision. So, it was when a Roman Centurian and his gentile family and friends heard the Gospel and received it, and the same Holy Spirit, that fell on the Jews at Pentecost in Jerusalem, fell on them in Caesarea. And the idea of Peter eating "Pork" meat, a

common Gentile food seemed like he gone apostate. Peter needed to explain himself.

Circumcision Party: Understand Jesus as fulfilling the role of Messiah and dying for the sins of Jews could clearly be shown in scripture. Isaiah 53, perfectly describes how the Messiah/Christ would die for the sins of humanity, at least Jewish humanity. At least that what this group of Jewish believers in Jesus thought. Early Christianity was Jewish movement, there were plenty of questions to be addressed. Such as; what happens to the Laws of Moses? The Temple sacrifices? How were Jews to act and behave who believe in Jesus? All these issues were going to be addressed as the Church began to expand outside of the Jewish world of Judea into the Gentile realms.

This party plays a significant role, as countering the work of Paul, as we seen in the epistle of the Galatians. After they accept Gentile conversion, they began to teach, yes the Gentiles can be saved, as long as they follow Jewish customs and traditions, in addition to believing in Jesus (Galatians 2:12, Titus 1:10).

This party seemed to centered in Jerusalem, as many of the Pharasies who became believers in Jesus, did not really understand how the Gospel of Jesus related to the Mosaic Law, so they taught you must keep both the laws of Moses and believe in Jesus.

> Galatians 2:11-12
> 11 But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.
> 12 For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party.

Here in Galatians, Paul tells on Peters fear of rejection by the Jews aligned with the Circumcision Party, Peter is like us, he wanted to be accepted by the Jews at home, who also believed in Jesus, but had the pedigree of the Pharisees. Paul, formelly Saul, already lived through the rejection, so Peter needed some correction from Paul on how to act around the Gentiles.

Ate with them: Peter was given the vision in Acts 10, so he could understand the meaning of the Gospel, the death of Jesus on the Cross, was not only for Jews, but it was also for the world. The works of obedience to the Law were fulfilled in Jesus, including dietary rules, the New Covenant was relational. Peter was free to eat food with his new Gentile friends and not worry about breaking the law of Moses because the New Covenant, replaced the Law of Moses. It was really a spiritual revolution taking place.

> Jeremiah 31:31-34
> 31 "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah,
> 32 not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD.
> 33 For <u>this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts</u>. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.
> 34 And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and <u>I will remember their sin no more."</u>

Peter is going to explain himself to the Jerusalem church, why did what he did.

Peter Tells What Happened

> 4 But Peter began and explained it to them in order:
> 5 "I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision, something like a great sheet descending, being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to me.
> 6 **Looking at it closely**, I observed animals and beasts of prey and reptiles and birds of the air.
> 7 And I heard a voice saying to me, 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat.'

8 But I said, ‘By no means, Lord; for nothing common or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’
9 But the voice answered a second time from heaven, ‘What God has made clean, do not call common.’
10 This happened three times, and all was drawn up again into heaven.
11 And behold, at that very moment three men arrived at the house in which we were, sent to me from Caesarea.
12 And the Spirit told me to go with them, making no distinction. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man's house.
13 And he told us how he had seen the angel stand in his house and say, ‘Send to Joppa and bring Simon who is called Peter;
14 he will declare to you **a message by which you will be saved**, you and all your household.’
15 As I began to speak, the **Holy Spirit fell** on them just as on us at the beginning.
16 And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’
17 If then God gave the **same gift** to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?”
18 When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, “Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.”

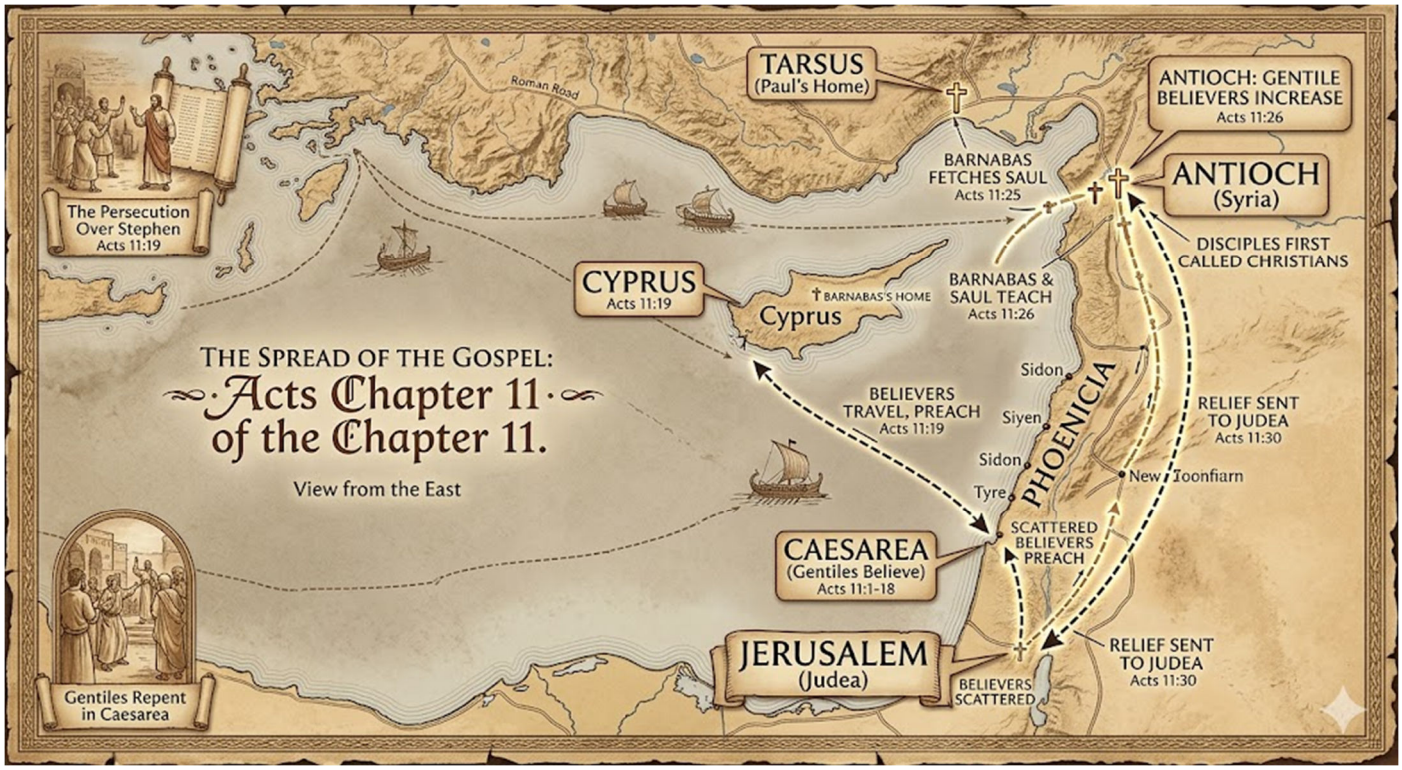
The events here correspond with events in Chapter 10, except he tells us he was “**looking at it closely**” and examining the sheet with four distinct animal groups; including beasts of prey (bears, lions, wolves for example) and reptiles. Now Leviticus 11:30, specifically tells us reptiles are off the menu, so it goes against what most of the Jews of Jerusalem have done their whole lives. You mean you can now eat the gecko, the monitor lizard and the chameleon?

A message by which you will be saved: The Gospel, God has chosen humanity to deliver the Gospel, the angel could have told Cornelius what to do, but he used an angel to have him go and get Peter in Joppa, who then came and delivered the Good News.

Holy Spirit Fell: The events of the Gentile’s receiving the Holy Spirit mirrored the events in Jerusalem, Acts 2, because the Gentiles were to be on an equal footing. The Gentiles received the **same gift,** Peter also had six brother, Jews who were believers who came with him from Joppa to Caesarea who witnessed the events.
Fell silent: They were in shock. This was big news to them. Wow that means the **Gentiles** have been “**granted repentance that leads to life**”. You can hear their amazement to this report. Isaiah foretold this would come, when the Servant of the Lord would bring salvation to the *Goyum* or the nations.

Isaiah 42:1
1 Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.(Gentiles, Goy)

Isaiah 49:6
6 he says: “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”



Barnabas and Saul at Antioch

19 Now **those who were scattered** because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one **except Jews**.
20 But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to **the Hellenists** also, preaching the Lord Jesus.
21 And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord.
22 **The report** of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch.
23 When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose,
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.
25 So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for **Saul**,
26 and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a **whole year** they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.

Those who were scattered; The Jewish believers in Jesus had scattered to safer areas, where they could mingle with the Greek, Roman and Syrian populations without Jewish intervention. Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch were all under Roman authority, but not Jewish authority. All these areas had sizable Jewish communities. So they had the community of Jews, without their authority over them. At this point, the message of Jesus was within the Jewish community. Wherever they escaped, they took the Gospel, but it was to a primarily a Jewish Audience, so the word(the Gospel) to no one, **Except Jews.**

Antioch: This was the third largest Roman city, with Rome and Alexandria being larger. The city was founded by Selucus Nicanor, one the successor of Alexander the Great, one of his generals. It was given the name Antioch, in honor of his father Antiochus in 301 BC. It was the capital of or Roman Syria, and had a population between 200,000 to 500,000 in the time of Paul, with the estimate of the size of the Jewish community of being 20,000 to 40,000.

The Hellenists: Antioch was large city, where people from various backgrounds would interact, Roman and Greek Pagans who worshipped Jupiter, Zeus and Aphrodite. Along the pagans were the Greek and Roman philosophers with their varied ideas of “gods” and the afterlife. Along with Jews who were believers were also there, so you can imagine the conversations and the debates about what is true. This led to many of the Hellenists, becoming believers in Jesus the Messiah. **The report** reached Jerusalem, so as the events in Caesarea were taking place, the Holy Spirit was moving among the

Jewish believers escaping the earlier persecution.
Barnabas was sent, who later looked from Saul who was in Tarsus, during this period of Saul, absence, after he escaped from Jerusalem to this point he remained in Tarsus, where it seems he was under persecution and was disinherited from his family for his faith in Jesus.

Philippians 3:8
8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ

Saul: They taught these Greek believers in Jesus for a whole year while in Antioch, fulfilling the Great Commission of Matthew 28:16. This was Christianity 101, and discipleship for a **Whole year,** this is what we are called to do. We are called by the Lord to Disciple and teach those God puts in our sphere

Relief to Judea

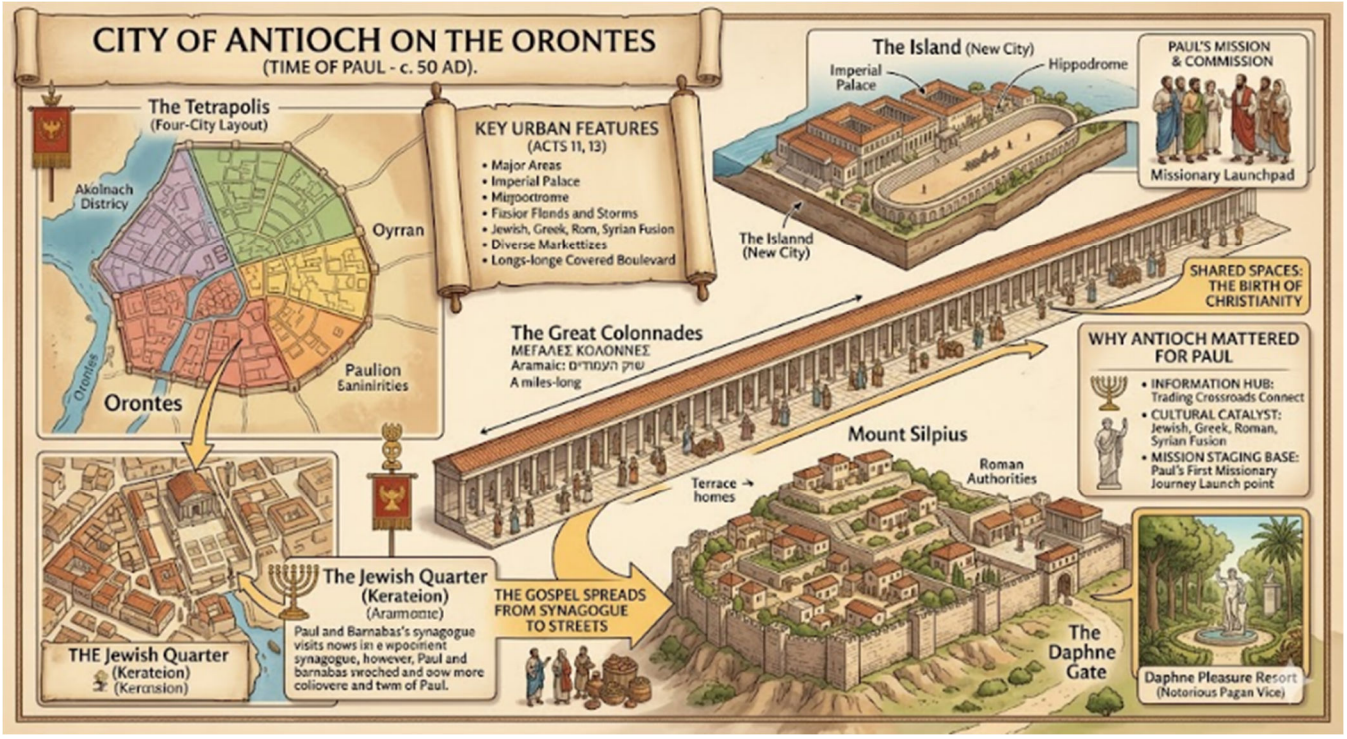
27 Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch.
28 And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius).
29 So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea.
30 And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

Claudius

Roman marble bust of Claudius, wearing a *corona civica*, Naples National Archaeological Museum

Roman emperor	
Reign	24 January 41 – 13 October 54

In the days of Claudius Caesar - The Roman emperor. He began his reign in 41 a.d., and he reigned for 13 years. He was at last poisoned by one of his wives, Agrippina, who wished to raise her son Nero to the throne. During his reign no less than four different famines are mentioned by ancient writers, one of which was particularly severe in Judea, and was the one, doubtless, to which the sacred writer here refers:
(1) The first happened at Rome, and occurred in the first or second year of the reign of Claudius. It arose from the difficulties of importing provisions from abroad. It is mentioned by Dio, whose words are these: “There being a great famine, he (Claudius) not only took care for a present supply, but provided also for the time to come.” He then proceeds to state the great expense which Claudius was at in making a good port at the mouth of the Tiber, and a convenient passage from thence up to the city (did, lib. lx. p. 671, 672; see also Suetonius, Claudius, cap. 20).
(2) A second famine is mentioned as having been particularly severe in Greece. Of this famine Eusebius speaks in his Chronicon, p. 204: “There was a great famine in Greece, in which a modius of wheat (about half a bushel) was sold for six drachmas.” This famine is said by Eusebius to have occurred in the ninth year of the reign of Claudius.
(3) In the latter part of his reign, 51 a.d., there was another famine at Rome, mentioned by Suetonius (Claudius, cap. 18), and by Tacitus (*Ann.*, Joh 12:43). Of this, Tacitus says that it was so severe that it was deemed to be a divine judgment.
(4) A fourth famine is mentioned as having occurred particularly in Judea. This is described by Josephus (*Antiq.*, book 20, chapter 2, section 5). “A famine,” says he, “did oppress them at the time (in the time of Claudius); and many people died for the lack of what was necessary to procure food withal. Queen Helena sent some of her servants to Alexandria with money to buy a great quantity of grain, and others of them to Cyprus to bring a cargo of dried figs.” This famine is described as having continued under the two procurators of Judea, Tiberius Alexander and Cassius Fadus. Fadus was sent into Judea, on the death of Agrippa, about the fourth year of the reign of Claudius, and the famine, therefore, continued probably during the fifth, sixth, and seventh years of the reign of Claudius. See the note in Whiston’s *Josephus*, *Antiq.*, book 20, chapter 2, section 5; also Lardner as quoted above. Of this famine, or of the want consequent on the famine, repeated mention is made in the New Testament.


CITY OF ANTIOCH ON THE ORONTES
(TIME OF PAUL - c. 50 AD).
The Tetrapolis
(Four-City Layout)
Akolnach Districy
Oyrran
Paulion
Orontes
KEY URBAN FEATURES
(ACTS 11, 13)
• Major Areas
• Imperial Palace
• Fusior Flonds and Storms
• Jewish, Greek, Rom, Syrian Fusion
• Diverse Markettizes
• Longs-longe Covered Boulevard
The Island (New City)
Imperial Palace
Hippodrome
The Islannd (New City)
PAUL'S MISSION & COMMISSION
Missionary Launchpad
SHARED SPACES: THE BIRTH OF CHRISTIANITY
The Great Colonnades
ΜΕΓΑΛΕΣ ΚΟΛΟΝΝΕΣ
A miles-long
WHY ANTIOCH MATTERED FOR PAUL
• INFORMATION HUB: Trading Crossroads Connect
• CULTURAL CATALYST: Jewish, Greek, Roman, Syrian Fusion
• MISSION STAGING BASE: Paul's First Missionary Journey Launch point
Mount Silpius
Terrace homes
Roman Authorities
The Jewish Quarter
(Kerateion)
THE GOSPEL SPREADS FROM SYNAGOGUE TO STREETS
THE Jewish Quarter
(Kerateion)
The Daphne Gate
Daphne Pleasure Resort
(Notorious Pagan Vice)

1ST CENTURY ANTIOCH: STRATEGIC & SPIRITUAL HUB
IMPERIAL STATS
Status: Capital of Roman Syria
Rank: 3rd Largest City
Population: 100,000 - 300,000+
URBAN LAYOUT & ARCHITECTURE
The Grid
Monumental Walls
Exclusive River
Colonnades Boulevard
Hippodrome
Covered sidewalks
Notorious Pagan Vice
The Grid
Exclusive River
Colonnades Boulevard
Daphne
Temple of Apollo
Notorious Pagan Vice
Pleasure resort
CULTURAL MELTING POT
GREEK
Lan-guage
ROMAN
JEWISH
SYRIAN
BIBLICAL MILESTONES (Acts 11 & 13)
1 PARADIGM SHIFT: FIRST GENTILE CHURCH
2 NEW LABEL: BELIEVERS FIRST CALLED "CHRISTIANS"
3 MISSIONARY LAUNCHPAD: PAUL'S CHURCH & COMMISSION
Paul's Conflict
PARADIGM SHIFT: FIRST GENTILE CHURCH
NEW LABEL: BELIEVERS FIRST CALLED "CHRISTIANS"
MISSIONARY LAUNCHPAD: PAUL'S CHURCH & COMMISSION
WHY IT MATTERED FOR PAUL
IF JERUSALEM WAS THE CRADLE, ANTIOCH WAS THE CATALYST!
• Forced Diversity Decisions
• Defined Christianity as Global
• Provided Resources & Staging Base
• Multi-cultural Training Ground