

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Acts Chapter 11 — The Gospel Spreads to the Gentiles

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Acts Chapter 11 continues one of the most important developments in the early church:

The gospel is spreading openly and unmistakably to the Gentiles.

Acts 10 recorded Peter entering the home of Cornelius, preaching Jesus Christ, and witnessing the Holy Spirit come upon Gentile believers.

Acts 11 begins with controversy.

The apostles and believers in Judea hear that Gentiles have received the Word of God.

But when Peter returns to Jerusalem, some Jewish believers criticize him.

Their complaint is not initially:

“Did they believe?”

It is:

“You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.”

This reveals how deeply old cultural and ceremonial boundaries remained in the minds of some believers.

Peter does not respond angrily.

He carefully explains what happened.

He recounts:

- His vision in Joppa.
- God’s command not to call unclean what God had made clean.
- The arrival of Cornelius’ messengers.
- The direction of the Holy Spirit.
- Cornelius’ angelic vision.
- The preaching of the gospel.
- The Holy Spirit falling upon the Gentiles.

Then Peter reaches the unavoidable conclusion:

“Who was I to stand in God’s way?”

When the believers hear this, they stop arguing.

Then they praise God and declare:

“God has granted even to the Gentiles repentance that leads to life.”

The chapter then shifts to Antioch.

Believers scattered by persecution travel far beyond Jerusalem.

Some begin preaching the Lord Jesus to Greeks also.

The Lord blesses the work.

Many believe.

Barnabas is sent to Antioch.

When he arrives, he sees the grace of God at work and rejoices.

Then Barnabas does something extremely important.

He goes to Tarsus to find Saul.

He brings Saul to Antioch.

For an entire year:

Barnabas and Saul teach the church.

And in Antioch:

The disciples are first called Christians.

The chapter ends with a prophecy of famine.

The believers in Antioch respond by giving generously to help the believers in Judea.

Acts 11 therefore shows us a church becoming:

More diverse.

More missionary.

More teachable.

More generous.

More clearly centered upon Jesus Christ.

The central truth of Acts 11 is:

God's salvation reaches Jew and Gentile alike, and a healthy church recognizes God's work, strengthens new believers through teaching and encouragement, and expresses gospel unity through practical generosity.

I. THE GENTILES RECEIVE THE WORD OF GOD

Acts 11:1

“The apostles and believers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God.”

News traveled quickly.

Something historic had happened.

Gentiles had received:

“The Word of God.”

Cross References

Acts 10:45

The Jewish believers who had come with Peter were amazed because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even upon the Gentiles.

Acts 8:14

When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the Word of God, they sent Peter and John to them.

Acts 19:10

The Word of the Lord spread so widely that people throughout the region heard the message concerning Jesus.

Spiritual Principle

Whenever the gospel crosses a new boundary, the church must be willing to recognize what God is doing.

II. PETER IS CRITICIZED

Acts 11:2

“When Peter went back to Jerusalem, some of the Jewish believers criticized him.”

Peter had obeyed God.

Yet believers still criticized him.

Cross References

Galatians 2:11

Paul later described confronting Peter openly when Peter's behavior toward Gentile believers became inconsistent.

Acts 15:1

Some men later taught that Gentile believers needed circumcision according to the custom of Moses in order to be saved.

Acts 21:20

Many Jewish believers in Jerusalem remained deeply committed to traditional Jewish practices.

Spiritual Principle

Doing God's will does not guarantee that every believer will immediately understand or approve of what God is doing.

III. THE COMPLAINT CENTERS ON TABLE FELLOWSHIP

Acts 11:3

"They said, 'You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.'"

Their concern reveals how strongly Jewish-Gentile separation shaped their thinking.

Cross References

Galatians 2:12

Peter later withdrew from eating with Gentile believers because he feared criticism from certain Jewish Christians.

Acts 10:28

Peter told Cornelius that God had shown him not to call any person impure or unclean.

Leviticus 20:26

God had called Israel to be holy and distinct from the surrounding nations.

Important Truth

The problem was not that God's Old Testament commands had been meaningless.

The problem was failing to understand how Christ had fulfilled and transformed the old covenant boundaries.

Spiritual Principle

Traditions formed around genuine biblical distinctions can become obstacles when God reveals their fulfillment in Christ.

IV. PETER EXPLAINS EVERYTHING CAREFULLY

Acts 11:4

“Peter explained everything to them in order.”

Peter does not insult his critics.

He explains.

Cross References

Luke 1:3

Luke explained that he carefully investigated the events and arranged them in an orderly account.

Acts 10:8

Cornelius had carefully explained his vision before sending messengers to Peter.

Acts 15:12

Later the church listened as Barnabas and Paul described what God had done among the Gentiles.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

When misunderstanding arises, careful explanation is often better than immediate defensiveness.

V. PETER RECOUNTS THE VISION

Acts 11:5

“I was in Joppa praying, and in a vision I saw something like a large sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners.”

Peter begins with prayer and divine revelation.

Cross References

Acts 10:9

Peter went onto the rooftop around noon to pray.

Acts 10:11

Peter saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet descending.

Acts 9:43

Peter had been staying in Joppa with Simon the tanner.

Spiritual Principle

Peter's actions toward Cornelius did not arise from personal rebellion against tradition; they arose from God's direction.

VI. PETER SEES ALL KINDS OF ANIMALS

Acts 11:6

"Inside were all kinds of animals, wild beasts, reptiles, and birds."

Cross References

Acts 10:12

Peter saw many kinds of animals, reptiles, and birds.

Genesis 1:24

God created the different kinds of land animals and living creatures.

Genesis 7:14

Noah entered the ark with every kind of animal and bird that God preserved.

Spiritual Principle

God used Peter's familiar understanding of clean and unclean food to prepare him for a larger lesson about people.

VII. "GET UP, PETER. KILL AND EAT."

Acts 11:7

"Then I heard a voice say to me, 'Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.'"

Cross References

Acts 10:13

The voice in Peter's vision told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat."

Genesis 9:3

After the flood, God told Noah that living creatures could be used for food.

Mark 7:19

Jesus taught that food does not spiritually defile the heart, thereby removing ceremonial food distinctions as a measure of holiness.

Spiritual Principle

God was teaching Peter that old ceremonial categories could no longer be used as barriers against those Christ was receiving.

VIII. PETER OBJECTS

Acts 11:8

"But I replied, 'No, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.'"

Peter's response reveals how strongly the old pattern shaped him.

Cross References

Acts 10:14

Peter told the Lord that he had never eaten anything common or unclean.

Ezekiel 4:14

Ezekiel told God that he had never knowingly defiled himself with ceremonially unclean food.

Daniel 1:8

Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the king's food.

Spiritual Principle

Deeply rooted religious habits do not change instantly, even in sincere believers.

IX. GOD CORRECTS PETER'S THINKING

Acts 11:9

“The voice spoke again from heaven: ‘Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.’”

Cross References

Acts 10:15

God told Peter not to call unclean what He had made clean.

Romans 14:14

Paul explained that nothing is inherently unclean in itself under Christ.

1 Timothy 4:4

Everything God created is good when received with thanksgiving.

Key Truth

God's command was not merely about food.

Peter had already interpreted it concerning Gentiles:

Do not call people unclean whom God is receiving through Christ.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The believer must let God's truth correct inherited prejudice.

X. THE VISION HAPPENS THREE TIMES

Acts 11:10

“This happened three times, and then it was all pulled back up into heaven.”

The repetition reinforces the certainty of the message.

Cross References

Acts 10:16

Peter's vision occurred three times before the sheet was taken back into heaven.

2 Corinthians 12:8

Paul said he asked the Lord three times to remove his affliction.

John 21:17

Jesus asked Peter three times whether he loved Him.

Spiritual Principle

God sometimes repeats a lesson because our hearts need repeated correction.

XI. THE MESSENGERS ARRIVE AT THE RIGHT MOMENT

Acts 11:11

“Just then three men came to the house where I was staying. They had been sent from Caesarea.”

The timing confirms the vision.

Cross References

Acts 10:19

While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit told him that men were looking for him.

Acts 10:20

The Spirit told Peter to go with them without hesitation because God had sent them.

Acts 10:8

Cornelius had sent the men to Joppa after receiving the angel’s command.

Spiritual Principle

God’s providence often confirms God’s direction through circumstances that fit together unmistakably.

XII. THE SPIRIT TELLS PETER TO GO

Acts 11:12

“The Spirit told me to go with them without hesitation. These six brothers went with me, and we entered the man’s house.”

Peter emphasizes:

The Spirit told me.

Cross References

Acts 10:20

The Holy Spirit told Peter to go with the messengers because God had sent them.

Acts 10:23

Peter traveled with the messengers and several believers from Joppa.

Acts 15:9

Peter later said God made no distinction between Jewish and Gentile believers, cleansing their hearts by faith.

Spiritual Principle

Peter did not enter Cornelius' house because social pressure forced him. He entered because the Holy Spirit directed him.

XIII. CORNELIUS HAD ALSO RECEIVED A MESSAGE

Acts 11:13

“He told us how he had seen an angel in his house who said, ‘Send to Joppa for Simon called Peter.’”

Peter was not the only person receiving divine guidance.

Cross References

Acts 10:3

Cornelius clearly saw an angel of God in a vision.

Acts 10:5

The angel told Cornelius to send men to Joppa for Peter.

Acts 10:22

Cornelius' messengers explained that an angel had instructed him to send for Peter.

Spiritual Principle

God prepared both the messenger and the hearer.

XIV. A MESSAGE THROUGH WHICH THEY WOULD BE SAVED

Acts 11:14

“He will bring you a message through which you and your household will be saved.”

This verse makes the necessity of the gospel unmistakable.

Cornelius was:

Devout.

Prayerful.

Generous.

God-fearing.

Yet he still needed:

A saving message.

Cross References

Acts 16:31

Paul and Silas told the jailer, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.”

John 4:53

The royal official believed in Jesus, and faith spread through his household.

Acts 18:8

Crispus, the synagogue ruler, believed in the Lord together with his household, and many others believed and were baptized.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Religious sincerity is not the saving message. Jesus Christ is.

XV. THE HOLY SPIRIT FALLS UPON THE GENTILES

Acts 11:15

“As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them just as He had come on us at the beginning.”

Peter connects Cornelius’ experience directly with Pentecost.

Cross References

Acts 2:4

At Pentecost the believers were filled with the Holy Spirit.

Acts 10:44

While Peter was preaching, the Holy Spirit came upon everyone hearing the message.

Acts 19:6

The Holy Spirit later came upon other believers during the expansion of the gospel.

Key Truth

Gentiles received the same Spirit, not a lesser Spirit.

XVI. PETER REMEMBERS THE WORDS OF JESUS

Acts 11:16

“Then I remembered what the Lord said: ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’”

Peter interprets the event through Jesus’ words.

Cross References

Acts 1:5

Jesus told the disciples, “John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

Matthew 3:11

John said that the One coming after him would baptize with the Holy Spirit.

Luke 3:16

John declared that Jesus would baptize people with the Holy Spirit.

Spiritual Principle

The best interpretation of spiritual experience is rooted in the Word of God.

XVII. “WHO WAS I TO STAND IN GOD’S WAY?”

Acts 11:17

“So if God gave them the same gift He gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to stand in God’s way?”

This is Peter’s decisive argument.

God gave the gift.

God accepted the believers.

God acted.

Peter's responsibility was to recognize it.

Cross References

Acts 15:8

Peter later said God showed His acceptance of Gentiles by giving them the Holy Spirit just as He had given the Spirit to Jewish believers.

Romans 10:12

There is no distinction between Jew and Gentile because the same Lord is Lord of all.

Acts 10:47

Peter asked how anyone could refuse baptism to those who had received the Holy Spirit just as the Jewish believers had.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Never oppose what God has clearly approved.

XVIII. THE CHURCH PRAISES GOD

Acts 11:18

“When they heard this, they stopped arguing and praised God, saying, ‘So then, God has granted even to the Gentiles repentance that leads to life.’”

This is a beautiful response.

They were corrected.

Then they changed.

Then they praised God.

Cross References

Acts 13:48

Gentile hearers rejoiced when they heard the good news and glorified the Word of the Lord.

Romans 15:9

Gentiles glorify God because of His mercy.

2 Peter 3:9

God is patient, not wanting people to perish but calling them to repentance.

Spiritual Principle

Spiritual maturity is shown not by never being wrong, but by changing when God makes the truth clear.

Key Truth

Repentance leading to life is God's gift to Gentiles as well as Jews.

XIX. PERSECUTION CONTINUES SPREADING THE GOSPEL

Acts 11:19

“Meanwhile, those who had been scattered by the persecution when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch. They spoke the word only to Jews.”

The scattering that began in Acts 8 continues producing missionary expansion.

Cross References

Acts 8:1

After Stephen's death, great persecution scattered believers throughout Judea and Samaria.

Acts 8:4

Those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the Word.

Acts 7:60

Stephen died after praying for the people who were killing him.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Persecution can scatter believers without scattering the mission.

XX. BELIEVERS BEGIN PREACHING TO GREEKS

Acts 11:20

“But some believers from Cyprus and Cyrene went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus.”

This is a major development.

Ordinary believers begin proclaiming Jesus beyond Jewish circles.

Cross References

Acts 4:36

Barnabas himself was a Levite from Cyprus.

Acts 13:1

Antioch later became home to a diverse group of prophets and teachers.

Acts 17:4

Many Greeks later believed the gospel through Paul's preaching.

Spiritual Principle

The gospel naturally expands when believers understand that Jesus is Lord of all people.

XXI. THE LORD'S HAND IS WITH THEM

Acts 11:21

"The Lord's hand was with them, and a large number of people believed and turned to the Lord."

The growth is attributed to God's power.

Cross References

Acts 4:4

Many people who heard the message believed.

Luke 1:66

The hand of the Lord was upon John as God prepared him for ministry.

Acts 5:14

More and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to the church.

Spiritual Principle

Effective ministry depends upon the Lord's hand, not merely human ability.

XXII. BARNABAS IS SENT TO ANTIOCH

Acts 11:22

"News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, so they sent Barnabas to Antioch."

Jerusalem sends someone to evaluate and encourage the work.

Barnabas is an excellent choice.

Cross References

Acts 8:14

Jerusalem had previously sent Peter and John when Samaria received the Word.

Acts 4:36

Barnabas was known as the son of encouragement.

Acts 15:22

Barnabas later continued serving as a trusted representative in important church matters.

Spiritual Principle

New gospel work needs wise encouragement, not unnecessary suspicion.

XXIII. BARNABAS SEES THE GRACE OF GOD

Acts 11:23

“When he arrived and saw the grace of God at work, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.”

Barnabas did not arrive looking for reasons to criticize.

He looked for evidence of grace.

And when he saw it:

He was glad.

Cross References

Acts 13:43

Paul and Barnabas encouraged believers to continue in the grace of God.

Acts 14:22

They strengthened disciples and encouraged them to remain faithful.

2 Corinthians 6:1

Paul urged believers not to receive God’s grace without allowing it to transform their lives.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A spiritual encourager knows how to recognize grace when God is working in people unlike himself.

XXIV. BARNABAS — A GOOD MAN

Acts 11:24

“Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and many people were brought to the Lord.”

Luke gives Barnabas a remarkable description.

Good

His character was evident.

Full of the Holy Spirit

His life was Spirit-directed.

Full of Faith

He trusted God.

Fruitful

Many people were brought to the Lord.

Cross References

Acts 6:5

Stephen was also described as full of faith and the Holy Spirit.

Acts 4:36

Barnabas was known among the apostles as a son of encouragement.

Galatians 5:22

The fruit of the Spirit includes love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Spiritual Principle

Fruitful ministry grows from godly character, faith, and dependence upon the Holy Spirit.

XXV. BARNABAS GOES LOOKING FOR SAUL

Acts 11:25

“Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul.”

Barnabas recognizes that the growing Antioch ministry needs help.

He remembers Saul.

Cross References

Acts 9:30

Saul had previously been sent from Caesarea to Tarsus.

Acts 9:27

Barnabas had earlier introduced Saul to the apostles.

Galatians 1:21

Paul later said he went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Good leaders are not threatened by gifted people; they go looking for them.

XXVI. SAUL IS BROUGHT TO ANTIOCH

Acts 11:26

“When he found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught many people. The disciples were first called Christians at Antioch.”

This verse contains three important developments.

Barnabas Brings Saul

Barnabas opens another door.

They Teach for One Year

Growth requires instruction.

The Disciples Are Called Christians

Their identity with Christ becomes publicly recognizable.

Cross References

Acts 26:28

King Agrippa later referred to becoming a Christian.

1 Peter 4:16

Peter later wrote that if someone suffers as a Christian, he should not be ashamed but glorify God.

Galatians 1:21

Paul had spent time in the regions near Tarsus before Barnabas brought him to Antioch.

Spiritual Principle

Evangelism brings people to Christ; teaching helps them grow in Christ.

XXVII. “CHRISTIANS”

The disciples were first called:

Christians

at Antioch.

The name centers their identity upon:

Christ.

Not nationality.

Not social status.

Not former religion.

Christ.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The highest identity of the believer is not political, cultural, racial, or social—it is belonging to Jesus Christ.

XXVIII. PROPHETS COME TO ANTIOCH

Acts 11:27

“During this time, some prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch.”

Prophetic ministry was active in the early church.

Cross References

Acts 13:1

The church at Antioch included prophets and teachers.

Acts 21:10

A prophet named Agabus later came and gave another message concerning Paul.

1 Corinthians 12:28

God appointed different ministries in the church, including apostles, prophets, and teachers.

Spiritual Principle

God gave different gifts and ministries for the strengthening and direction of the early church.

XXIX. AGABUS PREDICTS A FAMINE

Acts 11:28

“One of them, named Agabus, stood up and predicted through the Spirit that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. This happened during the reign of Claudius.”

Agabus gives a specific warning.

Cross References

Acts 21:11

Agabus later gave another Spirit-directed prophetic warning concerning Paul's imprisonment.

Luke 21:11

Jesus warned that famines and other disasters would occur.

Acts 18:2

Claudius is also mentioned later in Acts in connection with events affecting Jewish residents of Rome.

Spiritual Principle

God's warning should lead to faithful preparation, not panic.

XXX. THE DISCIPLES DECIDE TO HELP

Acts 11:29

“The disciples, each according to their ability, decided to provide help for the believers living in Judea.”

Their response to prophecy is practical.

They give.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 9:7

Each person should give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under pressure, because God loves a cheerful giver.

Romans 15:26

Gentile believers later gave financial help to poor believers in Jerusalem.

1 Corinthians 16:2

Paul instructed believers to set aside resources regularly according to their prosperity.

Spiritual Principle

Christian generosity is according to ability, motivated by love, and directed toward real need.

XXXI. THE GIFT IS SENT THROUGH BARNABAS AND SAUL

Acts 11:30

“They did this, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.”

Barnabas and Saul become trusted servants carrying relief to Judea.

Cross References

Acts 12:25

Barnabas and Saul later returned after completing their relief mission.

Romans 15:25

Paul later described traveling to Jerusalem to serve the believers there.

Galatians 2:1

Paul later traveled again to Jerusalem with Barnabas.

Spiritual Principle

Gospel unity becomes visible through practical generosity.

Gentile believers are helping Jewish believers.

The gospel has turned strangers into family.

XXXII. SEVEN GREAT LESSONS FROM ACTS 11

1. God's Salvation Is for All People

Jew and Gentile alike receive the gospel.

Principle:

No ethnic group possesses exclusive ownership of God's saving grace.

2. The Holy Spirit Confirms God's Acceptance

Peter points to the same Spirit being given to Gentiles.

Principle:

God Himself demonstrated that Gentile believers belonged fully to His people.

3. Mature Believers Change When God Makes Truth Clear

The Jerusalem believers stopped arguing and praised God.

Principle:

Humility receives correction.

4. Persecution Cannot Stop the Mission

Scattered believers continue preaching.

Principle:

What appears to be disruption may become expansion.

5. New Believers Need Encouragement and Teaching

Barnabas encouraged.

Barnabas and Saul taught.

Principle:

Conversion is the beginning of discipleship, not the end.

6. Christian Identity Is Centered in Christ

The disciples were first called Christians at Antioch.

Principle:

Believers should be recognizable by their connection to Jesus Christ.

7. Gospel Unity Produces Generosity

Antioch believers helped Judean believers.

Principle:

The gospel does not merely connect hearts spiritually; it opens hands practically.

XXXIII. WHAT PETER TEACHES ABOUT RESPONDING TO CRITICISM

Peter could have said:

“I am an apostle. Do not question me.”

He did not.

Instead:

He explained.

He gave evidence.

He pointed to the Spirit’s work.

He remembered Jesus’ words.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Spiritual authority does not eliminate the value of patient explanation.

XXXIV. WHAT THE JERUSALEM BELIEVERS TEACH ABOUT CORRECTION

Their first reaction was criticism.

But their final reaction was worship.

That is significant.

They Listened

They Considered the Evidence

They Stopped Arguing

They Praised God

Spiritual Principle

A teachable believer values God's truth more than winning an argument.

XXXV. “WHO WAS I TO STAND IN GOD’S WAY?”

This question reaches beyond Peter's experience.

It asks every church:

Are we resisting something God has clearly revealed?

Are we creating barriers He did not create?

Are we excluding people He has received through faith in Christ?

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Tradition becomes dangerous when preserving tradition requires opposing the clear work of God.

XXXVI. WHAT ANTIOCH TEACHES ABOUT A HEALTHY CHURCH

Antioch becomes one of the most important churches in Acts.

Why?

It Was Evangelistic

People preached Jesus.

It Was Diverse

Jewish and Gentile believers worshiped together.

It Was Encouraging

Barnabas strengthened believers.

It Was Teaching-Centered

Barnabas and Saul taught for a year.

It Was Generous

The church sent famine relief.

It Was Missionary

Acts 13 will show Antioch sending missionaries.

Spiritual Principle

A healthy church receives people, teaches people, strengthens people, gives to people, and eventually sends people.

XXXVII. BARNABAS — THE MINISTRY OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Barnabas appears repeatedly at crucial moments.

Saul Needed Acceptance

Barnabas stood beside him.

Antioch Needed Encouragement

Barnabas was sent.

Antioch Needed Teaching

Barnabas found Saul.

Believers Needed Relief

Barnabas helped carry it.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Encouragers do more than make people feel better; they help people become stronger and more useful in Christ.

XXXVIII. BARNABAS KNEW HE NEEDED HELP

Barnabas did not try to carry the entire Antioch ministry alone.

He went looking for Saul.

That reveals humility.

Spiritual Principle

Wise leaders recognize when God has gifted someone else to help accomplish the mission.

Pride says:

“I must do everything.”

Wisdom says:

“Who has God prepared to help?”

XXXIX. A WHOLE YEAR OF TEACHING

Barnabas and Saul taught the church for:

A whole year.

This demonstrates that discipleship requires sustained biblical instruction.

Spiritual Principle

Healthy churches do not merely count decisions; they teach disciples.

People need to learn:

Doctrine.

Obedience.

Prayer.

Holiness.

Christian relationships.

Mission.

Generosity.

The character of Christ.

XL. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A CHRISTIAN?

Acts 11:26 gives the historical name:

Christian.

The word points to identification with Christ.

A Christian is not merely:

A religious person.

A church attendee.

A moral person.

A cultural label.

A Christian is a person who belongs to Jesus Christ.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

If we bear Christ's name, our lives should increasingly reflect Christ's character.

XLI. THE GOSPEL TURNS STRANGERS INTO FAMILY

The end of Acts 11 is extremely important.

Gentile believers in Antioch send money to Jewish believers in Judea.

Old boundaries are collapsing.

These believers may never have met each other.

Yet they understood:

They are family in Christ.

Spiritual Principle

The gospel creates responsibility toward believers beyond our immediate congregation, culture, and location.

XLII. PROPHECY PRODUCES PREPARATION, NOT PANIC

Agabus predicts famine.

The disciples do not respond with hysteria.

They respond with generosity.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Biblical awareness of future difficulty should produce faithful preparation and compassionate action rather than fear-driven panic.

XLIII. WHAT ACTS 11 TEACHES ABOUT REPENTANCE

The believers declare:

“God has granted even to the Gentiles repentance that leads to life.”

Repentance is not merely sorrow.

It is a turning that leads toward life in Christ.

Spiritual Principle

True repentance turns away from sin and toward the living God.

XLIV. WHAT ACTS 11 TEACHES ABOUT GRACE

Barnabas arrived at Antioch and:

“Saw the grace of God at work.”

Grace can become visible.

How?

Changed lives.

Faith.

Unity.

Love.

Commitment.

Growth.

Generosity.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Grace is invisible in its source but often visible in its results.

XLV. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

Why were some Jewish believers upset with Peter?

They objected because Peter had entered the home of uncircumcised Gentiles and eaten with them.

Their concern reflected longstanding Jewish-Gentile separation.

Question 2

How did Peter respond to the criticism?

Peter carefully explained the entire event in order.

He described his vision, the Spirit's direction, Cornelius' angelic message, and the Holy Spirit coming upon the Gentiles.

Question 3

What was Peter's strongest evidence that God had accepted the Gentiles?

God gave them the same Holy Spirit He had given Jewish believers.

Peter therefore asked:

"Who was I to stand in God's way?"

Question 4

What did the Jerusalem believers do after hearing Peter's explanation?

They stopped arguing.

Then they praised God and acknowledged that God had granted repentance leading to life to Gentiles also.

Question 5

How did persecution help spread the gospel?

Believers scattered after Stephen's death traveled into other regions.

Wherever they went, they continued preaching.

The persecution therefore helped move the gospel beyond Jerusalem.

Question 6

What happened in Antioch?

Believers began preaching the Lord Jesus to Greeks.

The Lord blessed the ministry.

Many people believed and turned to Him.

Antioch became a major center of Christian growth and mission.

Question 7

Why was Barnabas sent to Antioch?

The Jerusalem church heard about the new work and sent Barnabas to see what was happening.

When Barnabas arrived, he recognized God's grace and encouraged the believers.

Question 8

Why did Barnabas go looking for Saul?

Barnabas understood that the growing Antioch church needed strong teaching.

He knew Saul had been called and gifted by God.

So he went to Tarsus, found Saul, and brought him to Antioch.

Question 9

Where were believers first called Christians?

At Antioch.

The name reflected their public identification with Jesus Christ.

Question 10

Who was Agabus?

Agabus was a prophet who predicted through the Holy Spirit that a severe famine would occur.

He later appears again in Acts 21.

Question 11

How did the Antioch believers respond to the famine prophecy?

They decided to send help to believers in Judea.

Each gave according to his or her ability.

Question 12

What is the main lesson of Acts 11?

God's saving grace extends to Gentiles as well as Jews, and the growing church must respond to that grace through humility, teaching, encouragement, mission, and generosity.

XLVI. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Acts 11 asks several important questions.

Can I Change My Mind When Scripture and God's Work Correct Me?

The Jerusalem believers did.

Am I More Committed to Christ Than to Tradition?

Peter had to learn this.

Do I Recognize God's Grace in People Different from Me?

Barnabas did.

Am I an Encourager?

Barnabas strengthened new believers.

Am I Willing to Seek Help in Ministry?

Barnabas went looking for Saul.

Am I Growing Through Biblical Teaching?

The Antioch believers received a year of instruction.

Does the Name “Christian” Fit My Life?

Can people see genuine identification with Christ?

Am I Generous Toward Believers in Need?

Antioch gave to Judea.

XLVII. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“When God Makes His Will Clear, Stop Arguing and Start Praising”

The Jerusalem believers began with criticism.

Then Peter explained.

The evidence became clear.

God had given Gentiles the same Spirit.

What happened?

“They stopped arguing and praised God.”

Principle

Spiritual maturity means caring more about God being right than about ourselves being proven right.

XLVIII. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“A Healthy Church Needs Both Barnabas and Saul”

Barnabas brought:

Encouragement.

Warmth.

Recognition of grace.

Saul brought:

Teaching.

Doctrinal depth.

Missionary calling.

Together they served Antioch.

Principle

Healthy ministry often requires different gifts working together rather than one personality trying to do everything.

XLIX. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“The Gospel That Saves Also Creates Responsibility”

The Antioch believers received grace.

Then they gave grace.

They heard about suffering in Judea.

They responded financially.

Principle

Saved people should become serving people, and received grace should produce generous grace.

L. FINAL APPLICATION

Acts Chapter 11 begins with criticism.

It ends with generosity.

It begins with believers struggling to understand Gentile inclusion.

It ends with Gentile believers helping Jewish believers.

That is the power of the gospel.

At the beginning, some believers say:

“You ate with them.”

By the end, believers from different backgrounds are acting like family.

Peter's explanation teaches us humility.

God may sometimes work beyond our expectations.

When He does, we must be willing to listen.

The Jerusalem church gives us a good example.

They argued at first.

But when the evidence became clear:

They stopped.

They praised God.

That is spiritual maturity.

Antioch then shows us what happens when the gospel is allowed to cross barriers.

People believe.

Barnabas encourages.

Saul teaches.

Disciples become known as Christians.

Generosity grows.

Mission expands.

The church becomes increasingly recognizable as a people centered upon Jesus Christ.

Acts 11 therefore challenges every believer:

Do not let tradition become greater than truth.

Do not let cultural difference become greater than Christian unity.

Do not let conversion remain without discipleship.

Do not let spiritual growth remain without generosity.

Do not carry the name Christian while living disconnected from Christ.

And when God's grace appears in unexpected places:

Rejoice.

Encourage it.

Teach it.

Strengthen it.

Support it.

And never stand in God's way.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You that Your salvation reaches all people.

Thank You that Jesus Christ is not only for one nation, one culture, or one background.

Thank You that repentance leading to life is available through Him.

Give us humble hearts.

When we misunderstand Your work, help us listen.

When Your Word corrects our traditions, help us obey.

Keep us from standing in Your way.

Teach us to recognize Your grace wherever You are truly working.

Give us the heart of Barnabas.

Make us encouragers.

Help us strengthen new believers.

Help us recognize gifts in others.

Keep us from jealousy in ministry.

Give us enough humility to go looking for people who can help advance Your work.

Thank You for Saul.

Thank You for the teaching ministry that helped strengthen Antioch.

Make our churches places of serious biblical instruction.

Help us become disciples who not only believe but grow.

Help us live worthy of the name:

Christian.

May our lives reflect Jesus Christ.

And when others suffer, make us generous.

Help us give according to our ability.

Teach us that the church is one family in Christ.

Break down prejudice.

Break down pride.

Break down unnecessary barriers.

Build churches that encourage, teach, give, serve, and send.

And may many people believe and turn to the Lord.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“When they heard this, they stopped arguing and praised God, saying, ‘So then, God has granted even to the Gentiles repentance that leads to life.’” — Acts 11:18

Central Truth

God's saving grace reaches Gentiles as well as Jews, and a healthy church humbly recognizes His work, strengthens believers through encouragement and biblical teaching, and demonstrates gospel unity through practical generosity.

Acts 11 in One Sentence

Peter explains how God unmistakably gave Gentile believers the same Holy Spirit, the Jerusalem church praises God for granting them repentance leading to life, and the gospel expands powerfully in Antioch where Barnabas and Saul teach the growing church, believers are first called Christians, and generous disciples send relief to suffering believers in Judea.