



"REASONS TO REJOICE"

"Your Words were found and I ate them, and Your Word was to me the joy and the rejoicing of my heart." Jeremiah 15:16

"RIDING THROUGH"

THE BOOK OF ACTS-LESSON 11

In our last lesson, we see some major changes happening in the church. News sure travels fast! Even in Peter's day, without the conveniences of telephones, fax machines, and the postal service, the news of the *Gentiles* receiving the Word of God arrived in Jerusalem before Peter did.

The first 18 verses in Acts chapter 11 are basically a continuation of chapter 10. Luke, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, obviously thought this event was worth repeating. **William Barclay**, in his commentary of the book of Acts, says this: "The importance that Luke attached to this incident is shown by the amount of space he devoted to it. In ancient times a writer had by no means unlimited space. The book form had not come into use. Writers used rolls of a material called papyrus, which was the forerunner of paper and was made of the pith of the papyrus plant, a kind of bulrush. Now a roll is an unwieldy thing and the longest roll that was used was about thirty-five feet long which would be almost precisely the length required to hold the book of Acts. Into that space Luke had almost endless material to fit. He must have selected with the greatest care what he was going to set down; and yet he finds the story of Peter and Cornelius of such importance that he twice relates it in full."

Last week we left Peter in Caesarea, teaching Cornelius and his friends more about Jesus. Let's see what God has in store for Peter now!

First Day

1. Read Acts 11:1-30. Reread verses 1-18. Do you find any new facts about this story? How do you think Peter must have felt when sharing with the Jews in Jerusalem? Scared? Nervous? Excited? Shocked?

2. What was Peter being accused of? (Acts 11:2-3)

"Those of the circumcision" are the Jews. They had honestly been converted to Christ, but were still clinging to their old ways. All they knew were the strict laws and rituals of Judaism, and they believed that being a good Christian meant keeping the high standard of Jewish legalism. The laws were burdensome but they were effective in keeping a Jew, a Jew. They thought that when a Gentile got saved, they should get circumcised, etc. They were brought up to think the Gentiles were different, and this thinking was still in them. So to think that Peter actually would eat with them was unthinkable.

Peter didn't argue with them, he just presented the facts. He begins by taking them back to the beginning.

3. What was Peter doing when he received the vision? (Acts 11:5)

4. Was it Peter's idea to go and preach to the Gentiles? How does verse 12 answer this question? Why was it important that they know this?

5. How many witnesses did Peter have with him? Why were they so important? (Acts 11:12)

Peter had twice as many witnesses as the Mosaic law demanded. God even planned that! Isn't He great?

6. When the Holy Spirit fell upon the Gentiles, what does Peter say he remembered? (Acts 11:16, Acts 1:5) Read John 1:25-33.

Peter makes a statement in verse 17 that stops them dead in their tracks.

7. How was Peter's statement in verse 17 a challenge for each Jew who was listening?

8. In Acts 11:17, what does Peter call the Holy Spirit?
9. What was the Jew's response? Did they believe Peter? (Acts 11:18)

Change is very hard. In general, I'd say that most of us are somewhat resistant to change. We like to be comfortable, secure, and confident, and change sometimes eliminates that. God uses change to shake us up and teach us to trust and rely on Him. When our beliefs, traditions, or even our convictions are challenged, we can get a little uncomfortable. We can easily become rigid in our methods of communicating God's truth, agreeing with only the things we are familiar with, or clutching tightly to "the way we were brought up."

Some things in our faith are absolute. We believe in the virgin birth, the atonement, the sinlessness of Christ, and salvation by grace through faith. We should never waiver from solid Biblical doctrine. What can be flexible is the way those truths are communicated. Our methods might have to change to meet the needs of our society or culture. We can't allow our traditions to become "law" to us, which can shut the door to the work of the Holy Spirit.

10. How do you respond to change? Are you still clinging to any of your old ways? Is God calling you to make some changes, and you find yourself struggling to obey?
11. Are you prejudiced against any certain "ways" people communicate the truth or live their Christian life? Do you expect them to be just like you? Do you have a list of dos and don'ts that you expect other Christians to live by?
12. Have you ever been criticized for doing some things a little differently than others? Perhaps spending time with people whom others may not think appropriate? Maybe going certain places, with the purpose of being a witness, that some may feel is not the right place to be?

Paul wrote the book of *Galatians* to show believers that there is freedom in Christ. If we live under the law, we remain in a prison. But Jesus is the key that unlocks those prison doors and sets us free!

With freedom comes responsibility. Our liberties only go so far as the Word of God allows. We should never allow our freedoms and liberties to stumble anyone else, Christian or not (1 Peter 2:16, *Galatians* 5:13).

This ends our lesson for today. The *Gentiles* could now share in their new life in Christ without becoming a Jewish proselyte. That's exciting news, don't you think?

Memory Verse of the Week: "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." Acts 11:23

Second Day

Review your memory verse.

Before we continue in chapter 11, let's take a brief look at some of the other visions and dreams we find in the New Testament. God often used dreams and visions to make His will known to the people. He used dreams when people were asleep, and visions when a person was awake. He used visions and dreams to guide, direct, encourage, and warn.

Below are listed Scripture references for a particular dream or vision. Look them up, and name the person whom it was given to, whether it was a dream or a vision, and the message that was communicated.

Scripture Reference (Name)	Dream or Vision	Message communicated
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1. Matthew 1:20

2. Matthew 2:13

3. Matthew 2:19-23
4. Matthew 2:12
5. Acts 9:3-9
6. Acts 9:10-16
7. Acts 10:3-6
8. Acts 16:9
9. Acts 18:9,10
10. Acts 23:11
11. 2 Corinthians 12:1-4
12. Can you name any dreams or visions from the Old Testament? Look up dreams or visions in your concordance and see what you find.

Third Day

Review this week's memory verse. Are you an encourager like Barnabas?

God used the death of Stephen to scatter the believers throughout the regions, which caused them to begin fulfilling the Great Commission. Acts 11:19 puts those who were scattered in the city of Antioch where there were many opportunities for evangelism.

1. Read Acts 11:19-21.
2. To whom were the believers preaching? Were they being selective? (Acts 11:19)

Believers were coming from all over to preach the Lord Jesus (Acts 11:20). They came from Phoenicia, which runs about 40 miles along the seacoast, north of Caesarea. They also came from Cyprus, an island off the coast of Syria and was the original home of Barnabas (Acts 4:36). The people of Cyprus worshipped a goddess named Venus. They also came from Cyrene, which was located on the North African coast in what is Libya today.

These believers came to Antioch to spread the gospel. Antioch may have been a difficult place to minister. Antioch was a province of Syria, and the third largest city, following Rome and Alexandria. It was 300 miles North of Jerusalem. It was a metropolitan city and was located 15 miles from the Mediterranean Sea, which made Antioch very cosmopolitan. It was known for its low moral standards, second only to the city of Corinth. This city was known for their chariot racing, gambling, and debauchery. They worshipped the goddess Daphne, whose temple housed prostitute priestesses. Apollo's famous pursuit of Daphne in the laurel groves around what became the site of the temple was reenacted night and day by the "worshippers" and the ritual prostitutes. The phrase "the morals of Daphne" became descriptive through the world of immorality at this time. (Lloyd John Ogilvie)

3. Was there fruit from their preaching? (Acts 11:21)

The phrase "the hand of the Lord" is an Old Testament term that is used to express the power of God (Isaiah 59:1, 66:14). When the hand of the Lord is with you, there will be fruit in your ministry, and your life.

4. Is the "hand of the Lord" evident in your life? Do you see His power working in your life? How?

5. What do these verses say about God's power?

- a. Ephesians 1:19:
- b. Psalm 66:7:
- c. Luke 1:35:
- d. 2 Corinthians 13:4:
- e. 1 Corinthians 6:14:

6. What should our response be to His power? Read Psalm 21:13, 59:16, and 145:11.

7. Are you limiting God's power in your life in any way? How?

The believers in Antioch needed someone to teach them the Word of God and disciple them in His ways. The apostles sent Barnabas to Antioch to check things out.

Today we saw the power of God as many people continued to believe on Him. Let's **rejoice** together in the power available to us through the Holy Spirit!

Fourth Day

Practice your memory verse.

Good news travels fast again. The mother church in Jerusalem heard all about the great things that God was doing in Antioch. These certainly were exciting times!

1. Read Acts 11:22-30.
2. Whom did they send to Antioch to check on things? (Acts 11:22)
3. Do you remember what his name means? (Acts 4:36) Read over your notes from Lesson 4, Fifth Day. Get reacquainted with Barnabas.

4. Why do you think he was a good choice?

5. What made Barnabas glad? (Acts 11:23)

The believers in Acts 2:46 were glad in heart also. They were praising God for all He had done. What makes you glad?

6. Do the things of the Lord make your heart glad, or is your heart glad when it's around the world? Can you be glad when a friend is prospering in a way that you desire to? Can you be glad for those whom God seems to continually bless? Be sure to spend time searching your heart on this one.

7. What will God do for us? Read Psalm 30:11-12.

Barnabas was a native of Cyprus and he was probably very excited to see his people involved in evangelism. Barnabas wasn't jealous over the growth of the church in Antioch, nor was he critical. He didn't visit them to study their growth techniques or to spy on them. He had a heart of gold that wanted to encourage these believers to keep doing what they were doing!

Verse 23 uses the term "**purpose of heart.**" Purpose is from the Greek word "prothesis" and it means a setting forth, or to place before. This would describe an action that is deliberate and planned.

To persevere in the Lord takes planned, deliberate action. It's a decision we make daily. This is called having a "purpose of heart."

8. What did he tell them to "purpose" to do? (Acts 11:23)

The word "cleave" is from the word *prosmeno*, and means "to abide with." To cleave to the Lord would then mean to abide, or live in Christ. Cleaving to God is a planned action of dedicating your heart to the Lord and living for Him.

There are many men and women in Scripture who purposed to cleave to the Lord. One such man is Daniel. He is a great example of a man who purposed in his heart to remain faithful to the Lord in a time of national distress.

9. Read Daniel chapter 1. What did he purpose in his heart not to do? Give the verse.
10. How did his "purpose of heart" get him into trouble? Read Daniel chapter 6. How did God honor his commitment?

I love the story of Daniel. I want to have a heart like his, don't you? We need to have a battle strategy all ready before we even encounter the temptation to sin. If we don't have a planned way of escape, we will most likely fall. If we don't plan our quiet time with the Lord, it will never happen. If we don't plan time to pray, we'll never do it. If we're single, and we have never purposed in our heart to remain pure, we'll fall when we're tempted. We, like Daniel, need to purpose in our heart not to be defiled!

11. Have you purposed in your heart to obey God, no matter what? Have you purposed in your heart to remain faithful to Him while you wait for His return? Spend some time in prayer regarding this question.

We should be encouraging and exhorting our friends like Barnabas does. Hebrews 3:13 tells us to "Exhort one another daily, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." We need to build each other up in the faith! Unbelievers can encourage us, but not in the things of the Lord.

The word exhortation means to admonish, to urge on, or to pursue some course of action. Chuck Smith says it means to come alongside someone and say, "Just do it!"

Romans 12:8 tells us that one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is exhortation. Those with this gift encourage us to do something that we know we should be doing. They help us get motivated to action.

12. Do you encourage your friends in the Lord? Do you exhort them to holy living? Do you try to build them up in their faith? Evaluate your friendships. What changes can you make?

13. Give some examples of ways to encourage your friends in the Lord.

This ends our lesson for today. We know that Barnabas could be such an encouragement because he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith (Acts 11:24). Would that describe you?

Fifth Day

Write out your memory verse. How has it encouraged you?

Barnabas saw that the believers in Antioch needed a shepherd who would teach them and care for them. Barnabas knows the perfect person to help!

1. Read Acts 11:25-30.
2. Who did Barnabas go find in Tarsus? (Acts 11:25)

The word Luke uses to describe how Barnabas was seeking after Saul literally means to seek up and down. Luke uses this word one other time in Luke 2:44-45 when Mary and Joseph were anxiously seeking Jesus when He had gone back to the temple to teach. They were desperately searching for Jesus, and Barnabas was desperately searching for Saul.

Our last glimpse of Saul was In Acts 9:30 when he was running from those who sought to kill him. He fled to Tarsus and now, about 10 years later, he reappears. What was he doing in Tarsus all this time? Was he teaching Jews and Gentiles? Was he establishing churches? Was he suffering hardships? We don't know, but I bet he was pretty busy!

3. What name was given to the believers in Antioch? (Acts 11:26)

The name "Christian" was thought to be a derogatory nickname given to those who were following after Christ. The name seemed to stick, and we are privileged to be called Christians today. The name is found three times in the New Testament (Acts 11:26, Acts 26:28 and 1 Peter 4:16). It means followers of Christ, or belonging to Christ. I like to think of it like this ... if you live in California, you are a Californian. Therefore, if you live in Christ, you are a Christian. That name identifies us with our precious Savior. It also identifies Him with us. We can't take that name lightly.

4. Are you living up to the name of Christian? The believers in Antioch were marked because they could tell by their life whom they were following. Can people tell by your life whom you are following? If not, what changes need to be made?

Alexander the Great once said, when speaking to a coward, "Either change your name, or mend your ways."

5. What did the prophet Agabus say was going to happen? (Acts 11:28)

6. How did the disciples in Antioch want to help the believers in Jerusalem? (Acts 11:29-30)

The Christians in Antioch were really living up to their name. Here they demonstrated God's love to those in need, by taking up a collection. Instead of storing up for themselves, they gave.

Winston Churchill said, "We make a living by what we get. But we make a life by what we give."

7. Are you helping those in need? Do you give to others according to the ability that you have? Or do you worry more about your own needs being met?

The church in Antioch sent their support by way of Saul and Barnabas. They delivered the money to the elders, which is the first mention of elders in the New Testament. This visit to Jerusalem may be the one that Paul mentions in Galatians 2. It may have been hard for Jewish believers to receive help from the Gentile church. The walls between them continue to be torn down, piece by piece.

Saul and Barnabas have become quite a team. They seem to minister together quite well. Maybe Saul was the teacher, while Barnabas was the encourager. It's great to see how the gifts of the Spirit work together so nicely.

8. Here's our last question for the day. What does being a Christian mean to you?

We've had many **"Reasons to Rejoice"** this week. If you need some encouragement, look back on each day, find a **"Reason to Rejoice,"** and then spend time thanking and praising Him for who He is. Your spirits will soar as you lift His name on high!