



**Message #26**  
**“HEAT AND EXPANSION”**  
**Acts 11:1-30**

At the end of Acts 10 (10:48) we saw that Peter stayed on a few days in Caesarea, presumably with Cornelius. During this time, word of Peter’s controversial act of entering a Gentile’s house etc travelled back to “the apostles and brothers throughout Judea” (11:1).

Naturally, and according to the inherent Judaistic cultural and ritualistic understandings, the church leaders in Jerusalem were incensed by Peter’s actions.

This incident shows how strongly the Jewish culture and perspective still had a grip on hearts and minds in this early period of the church’s development.

- Stephen had pointed away from the traditional elements of Judaism: the law, the land, the temple (7:2-53), to the arrival of the Messiah.
- Philip had taken the gospel to half-Jews, the Samaritans (8:1).
- Now Peter is about to push the whole church into a radical step away from its past and into its future.

The church leaders and believers in Jerusalem were angered by the reports of Peter mixing freely with the Gentiles...even to the point of being loose with the gospel and who it was shared with.

Of course, they had only heard one side of the story...and that “half of the story” was fuelled by their traditional anti-Gentile prejudices.

We must be careful that we do not follow this same well-worn path. Scripture speaks loudly against such things as gossip, falsehood, slander, misleading reports, etc. We must be wise in what we hear and listen to, as well as in what we pass on to others ourselves.

Peter arrived in Jerusalem to be met by an overflow of criticism.

**Have you ever been criticised by other Christians for doing what you believed was right?  
How did it feel? How did you respond?**

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Peter may have been surprised, perhaps even frustrated, by the response of his fellow apostles and believers in Jerusalem. This is (to my knowledge) the first occasion of a NT church leader being criticised openly like this. It is certainly not the last...and this has, over the centuries, become commonplace in the church.

We must remember that on this occasion the other believers had not had the benefit of the vision Peter had in which God broke down the walls of prejudice. So they were still acting out of their inherent prejudice, not from this newly discovered freedom.

Too often the perspective of people (including ourselves) is driven by our prejudices.

The early church was still largely bound up by the laws of man, not released by the law of God (to love).

Peter may have been surprised and frustrated by the reception he received. Maybe he expected it. The important thing for us to note is how he responded to it.

**HEAT (11:4-18)**

So Peter began to explain everything.... (11:4). He took the other leaders through the whole process that God had taken him through....the challenge of the vision, the messengers, the visit to Cornelius at Caesarea, the salvation of Cornelius and the others, the coming upon them of the Holy Spirit.

At the conclusion of his report he asked the leading question.... “*Who was I to think that I could oppose God?*” Peter was not going to please people and displease God.

**Have you ever had to choose between pleasing people and pleasing God?**

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The apostles and the church, having started off with criticism, had sufficient discernment and grace to accept Peter's account and to acknowledge that God had a bigger plan than they had been able to see....  
*The Gospel of Salvation in Christ was meant for the Gentiles as well as for the Jews!*

Verse 18 recognizes that repentance is vitally important for the new life in Christ.

**What do you understand repentance to be?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Is repentance only important in our relationship with God? What about in our other relationships?**

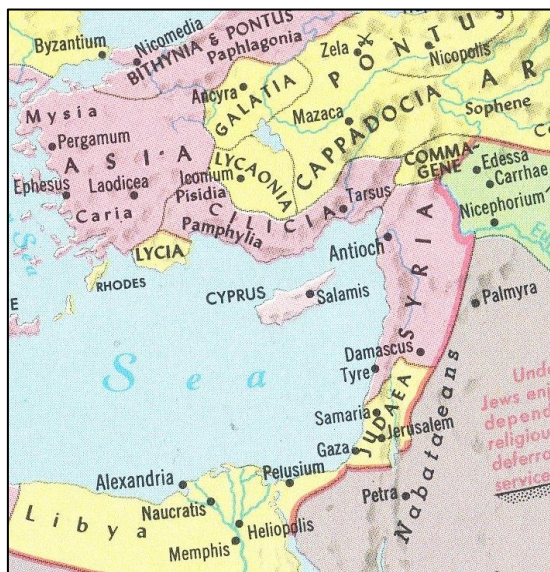
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### **EXPANSION (11:19-30)**

Following this major development (the acceptance of the Gentiles) in 11:18, Luke then dramatically shifts focus from Jerusalem.....to (Syrian) Antioch in the north.

**Antioch** was one of 16 towns/cities by the same name in the Mediterranean region (named after Antiochus). It was the third largest city in the Roman empire (after Rome and Alexandria).

It was then in Syria, now in modern-day Turkey (known as Antakya).



With the persecution that followed the killing of Stephen (8:4) there had been a great dispersion of believers out from Jerusalem. And we are told that "wherever they went they shared the good news".

Here we are told that this had primarily been to the Jews. But now, in Antioch, some believers who had come from Cyprus and Cyrene were sharing the gospel with the Greeks in Antioch. And "many believed" (11:21).

With the new-found belief that God accepted the Gentiles as much as the Jews, the church leaders immediately sent one of their best to Antioch to assist and encourage. They sent Barnabas. Barnabas has already proven himself to be a godly man and a great servant of the Lord and His church.

**What was Barnabas like, according to this passage?**

**What does it mean to "remain true to the Lord with all your heart" (11:23)?**

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Perhaps the most important thing that Barnabas did in this time was to travel up to Tarsus to enlist Saul. Previously, it had been Barnabas who had stood up for Saul and, obviously, saw great potential in him. Now he gets Saul to work alongside him in Antioch for a year serving the Lord and the growing church there.

**Verse 26** tells us that **"the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch"**

This is very significant because it was not in Jerusalem, the centre of Jewish Society...it was in the first Gentile church.

The name "Christian" comes from the Greek *christianos*, meaning follower of Christ, or belonging to Christ. It is important for us to not just be happy to take the **name** of Christ, without also being committed to displaying the **nature** of the One who we belong to. **What does the name "Christian" mean to you?**

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**The church in Antioch was known for its witness to non-Christians (v 20-22), for its loyalty to Christ (v 26), and for its generosity towards other believers (v 29). To what extent are these qualities things that your church is known for? And you, personally?**

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