

# Acts 10-11 Chapter Study

## INTRODUCTION

### Outline

#### II. Persecution & Peace Chs. 8-12

Last week, ended with Peter taking a pastoral tour through the cities & towns west of Jerusalem, visiting the many churches that had sprung up after persecution in Jerusalem drove thousands of believers into the surrounding regions.

Peter settled in the city of Joppa, staying in the home of Simon a tanner.

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Joppa had been the main port in central Israel for generations.

It's where Jonah had launched from.

But it had declined over the years, unsuitable as a port for the increased commerce of the Roman Empire.

Haifa had a far better harbor but it was too far north to be a reasonable port for Jerusalem.

So Herod the Great had set about building a new port at a place called Strabo's Tower where there was a shallow harbor.

Before Herod, only small craft were able to land & launch from there.

But his engineers deepened the harbor & built a massive breakwater to protect from the ever present southern swell.

The breakwater was so large, they built mooring slots on it & an entire complex of wharves where ships could be loaded.

They set a beacon at the opening to the harbor to guide in the ships during fog.

Then Herod built a massive, modern Roman style city & named it *Caesarea*, after Augustus Caesar.

It became the provincial capital of Israel & the seat of Roman administration.

It's where governors like Pontius Pilate lived & spent most of their time.

The water supply there was inadequate for the size city Herod planned, so he had his engineers develop an aqueduct that brought water from the region of Mt. Carmel, some 12 miles south to Caesarea.

Herod wanted Caesarea to be a mini-Rome, a city that would lure wealthy Romans to spend time in a thoroughly modern city situated in the balmy climate of the Eastern Mediterranean. [2 slides]

#### F. Conversion of Cornelius Ch. 10

##### 1. Cornelius' vision 10:1-8

**<sup>1</sup> There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, <sup>2</sup> a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always.**

Part of the brilliance of the Roman Army was its approach to battle.

Prior to Greece under Alexander & his father Philip, most warfare had been the chaos of 2 groups of soldiers rushing at each other across a battlefield.

It was a story of whoever had the most & strongest men with the best weapons.

The Greeks changed that by enforcing strict rules regarding battle formations

like the *phalanx*.

The Romans learned from the Greeks and *perfected* the organizing of an army.

They divided their forces up into groups called *legions* which had 6,000 men.

Each legion had all the kinds of soldiers it needed in order to be a self-sustaining force on the field.

Each legion was broken into 10 *cohorts* or *regiments* of 600 each.

Each cohort was further broken into 5 or 6 *centuries* of between 100 & 120 men.

Over the century was placed a *centurion*, roughly equal to a modern captain.

Historians consider centurions as the real backbone and genius of the Roman military.

Centurions were never political appointments.

They'd proven themselves in combat & by sheer skill as leaders.

A centurion was a man who'd earned the admiration & loyalty of his fellows & been promoted by his superiors because he'd earned it.

It's interesting that whenever we read about centurions in the NT, they are always spoken of in a good light.

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It's estimated that at this time, *less than half* the Roman Army was Italian.

Most of the army was made up of foreigners who'd been conquered by Rome and saw military life as a way to make a living & have some adventure.

*The Italian Cohort* was a special regiment of archers composed of Roman citizens from Italy.

They'd enlisted out of pride in Rome's glory.

They were elite troops who traveled around the Empire where ever there were rumblings of unrest.

That they were now in Caesarea indicates things were not going smoothly in Israel.

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While there, their commander, a centurion named Cornelius, found in Judaism, the religion he'd long been looking for.

He knew the paganism of Rome & Greece were bogus & yearned for truth.

He found it in the religion of the people of the land he now lived in.

Luke describes Cornelius as a devout man – devoted to the God he believed in.

That devotion found expression in 3 things:

- 1) He had a profound respect for God that he shared with those most important to him – his family.
- 2) He was generous and gave money to the poor.
- 3) He was fervent in prayer.

Cornelius's faith wasn't just for show.

It wasn't just a *said*-faith, a *dead*-faith; it was a *led*-faith—it led him to **DO** something.

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About 60 years before this, the Roman poet *Virgil* had said of the Gentile world that it was weary of its religions and “stretched out its hands in longing for the other shore.”<sup>[1]</sup>

Cornelius found that shore in the truth of Judaism.

But now that Christ had come, there was more. And so . . .

### **3 About the ninth hour of the day**

3 PM

**he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, “Cornelius!” <sup>4</sup>And when he observed him, he was afraid, and said, “What is it, lord?”**

“Master / Sir.”

**So he said to him, “Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God.**

God has seen & heard all Cornelius’ faith and is well pleased.

**<sup>5</sup> Now send men to Joppa, and send for Simon whose surname is Peter. <sup>6</sup> He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. He will tell you what you must do.”**

Last week Ananias in Damascus was told precisely where to find Saul.

Here we see that the angel knew right where Peter was & gave Cornelius specific instructions on where to find him.

Actually – he knew where Peter **WOULD** be when Cornelius’ servants got there.

God knows everything about us.

Not only does He know where we are, but as Jesus said, He knows the number of hairs on our head.

No easy feat considering the average person loses about 100 hairs a day.

[\[2\]](#)

God not only knows about us in this present moment – He knows about an hour from now, tomorrow, next week.

As the timeless & Eternal One, He’s already there, and He’s faithfully at work today & yesterday, to bring us to the tomorrow He ordains.

There’s a lot in that thought we’d be well served to meditate on.

**<sup>7</sup> And when the angel who spoke to him had departed, Cornelius called two of his household servants and a devout soldier from among those who waited on him continually. <sup>8</sup> So when he had explained all *these things* to them, he sent them to Joppa.**

He would have gone himself if he could but as a centurion he couldn’t leave his post in Caesarea.

## **2. Peter’s vision 10:9-20**

**<sup>9</sup> The next day, as they went on their journey and drew near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour.**

Mid-day, noonish.

He went up on the roof because that’s where people usually spent their leisure time.

The roofs were flat and accessed by either a ladder or outside staircase.

They had a wall about knee high that went around to keep people from falling off.

**<sup>10</sup> Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance <sup>11</sup> and saw heaven opened and an**

object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. <sup>12</sup> In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. <sup>13</sup> And a voice came to him, “**Rise, Peter; kill and eat.**” <sup>14</sup> But Peter said, “Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean.” <sup>15</sup> **And a voice spoke to him again the second time, “What God has cleansed you must not call common.”**

It's noon and time for the mid-day meal.

As Peter's on the roof praying, he realizes he's really hungry, and hard on the heels of this realization, he taken by the Spirit into a dream-like state.

The word “trance” gives the idea of that state between wake & sleep.

It's the word “exstasis” = ecstasy.

In Greek, it means *any* state of mind that's a departure from a normal, sober condition.

The context here ought to be understood as Peter being lifted from his normal consciousness as he prayed into a kind of dream-like place where he had this vision of a massive sheet with the 4 corners tied together, making a huge pouch.

It came down from heaven, filled with every kind of animal, bug & reptile in it. A voice then bade him get up, kill something and eat.

But much of the contents were not kosher – animals forbidden to eat for an observant Jew.

So Peter protested, thinking it was a test of his loyalty.

Then the voice overrode his objection by saying the command to eat made what had been unclean, clean.

If what's kosher is determined by the command of God, then if God commands a thing, it's kosher!

**<sup>16</sup> This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again.**

A thrice given command/lesson elevated it to the supreme level.

Peter understood this to be an imperative he had to pay attention to.

The problem was, it was a vision, a dream whose application he didn't really grasp.

He knew he was to pay special attention to it and *do* it, but *what* was he to do exactly??

**<sup>17</sup> Now while Peter wondered within himself what this vision which he had seen meant, behold, the men who had been sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate. <sup>18</sup> And they called and asked whether Simon, whose surname was Peter, was lodging there. <sup>19</sup> While Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Behold, three men are seeking you. <sup>20</sup> Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them.”**

And so the application – Peter was to go with the men who'd come from Cornelius in Caesarea.

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The reason for the vision and the clear leading of the Holy Spirit was because as an observant, culturally-immersed Jew, Peter never would have accepted the invitation of these Gentiles to return with them to Caesarea on his own.

Jews simply did not entertain or hang out with Gentiles – wasn't done.

And worst of all, unthinkable, was to enter a Gentiles home or eat with them.

But God had a plan – it was time to take the Gospel across the Jew-Gentile divide.

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**Question:** Why didn't the *angel* preach the Gospel to Cornelius?

Why go to the trouble of sending 3 servants to fetch Peter?

Certainly an angel is as eloquent as any man.

The answer is simple – the Gospel has not been committed to angels; that's the unique privilege of men & women, of human beings.

Angels cannot be saved, so they do not have a testimony of Christ's redeeming work.

Only people can be saved, and personal experience of the power of God to forgive sins and redeem lost sinners is a necessary part of proclaiming the Gospel.

Take encouragement from that – God hasn't committed the Gospel to angels; He's entrusted you & I with it.

That means effective soul-winning isn't about *eloquence*, or special skill.

It's not about being beautiful or wise or having all the answers.

If that was the criteria, *angels* would have us beat.

It's about having a personal experience of being born again.

### **3. Peter goes & preaches to Cornelius' house 10:21-43**

**<sup>21</sup> Then Peter went down to the men who had been sent to him from Cornelius, and said, "Yes, I am he whom you seek. For what reason have you come?" <sup>22</sup> And they said, "Cornelius *the* centurion, a just man, one who fears God and has a good reputation among all the nation of the Jews, was divinely instructed by a holy angel to summon you to his house, and to hear words from you." <sup>23</sup> Then he invited them in and lodged *them*. On the next day Peter went away with them, and some brethren from Joppa accompanied him.**

It's about 30 miles between Joppa & Caesarea, so it took a day & a half for the messengers to get to Joppa.

They spent the night then returned with Peter & a few others the next day.

Some believers from Joppa wanted to go with Peter to see what would happen.

The Gospel had already been preached in Samaria with many coming of faith there, but this was the first foray of the Gospel among the Gentiles.

They were eager to see what would happen.

**<sup>24</sup> And the following day they entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them, and had called together his relatives and close friends.**

Cornelius was stoked & had invited everyone he could think of.

When an angle tell you to send for someone who will tell you something important, you get the idea; it has to be *really, really big news*.

**<sup>25</sup> As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet**

**and worshiped *him*.**

Angels are beings of a great power & glory and tend to inspire fear & the desire for worship.

In v. 4 it says when Cornelius saw the angel he was *afraid*.

He reasons, if an angel would have me send for someone to do or say something he can't, whoever it is who's coming must be incredible!

So when Peter walks in, Cornelius, a Roman Centurion, falls down and starts worshipping.

All of this helps us understand what kind of a man Cornelius was.

He was a humble man who'd not been corrupted by the power he'd attained, nor hardened by the battle he'd seen or blood he'd spilt.

**26 But Peter lifted him up, saying, "Stand up; I myself am also a man."**

Peter knew better than to accept the worship of others

He well knew his own weaknesses & failures and would not in any way tolerate such reverence which ought to go only to God.

His response to Cornelius ought to go far in instructing those who would throw themselves at the feet of any man, *regardless* of his office.

**27 And as he talked with him, he went in and found many who had come together. 28 Then he said to them, "You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean."**

Actually, there was *no* Law against such – it was merely one more of the traditions of the Jews that had been elevated to the place of law.

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Mark well what Peter says at the end of v. 28 –

**God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.**

By common or unclean, he means off limits, untouchable; unworthy of relationship.

Peter understood God to say no human being is to be relegated to some class that would make him *less* than human, less than an image bearer of the divine & an object worthy of God's love.

In that we find THE answer to racism, prejudice, & bigotry over ethnic & social-economic divides.

**29 Therefore I came without objection as soon as I was sent for. I ask, then, for what reason have you sent for me?"**

Peter was all set to preach the Gospel to them, after all, the messengers had already briefed him.

But Peter wisely put the ball in Cornelius' court – deferring to him to start the session by asking him what he wanted to know.

This is an important clue to effective evangelism: Don't be too quick to launch in to what YOU think needs to be said.

Ask questions to find out where the person you're talking to is at, then use that as the bridge into the Gospel.

You're a lot more likely to find an opening and some interest if you'll scratch the itch of the person you're sharing with.



To the woman at the well, Jesus sued water as the bridge into her heart.

To the lame man at the pool of Bethesda, Jesus asked, “Why are you here?”

**30 So Cornelius said, “Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, <sup>31</sup> and said, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard, and your alms are remembered in the sight of God.**

Cornelius had been asking for more light, more truth – and God answered.

**32 Send therefore to Joppa and call Simon here, whose surname is Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea. When he comes, he will speak to you.’ <sup>33</sup> So I sent to you immediately, and you have done well to come. Now therefore, we are all present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God.” <sup>34</sup> Then Peter opened *his* mouth and said: “In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. <sup>35</sup> But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.**

This is an important insight.

Peter said that regardless of ethnicity or religious background, *whoever* fears Him & lives in light of that fear so that doing what’s right shapes their moral choices, then God will take care of them.

Exactly what that means we don’t know, but we can trust to the goodness of God to work it out.

In Cornelius’ place, it meant instructions to go get Peter so he could come and share the Gospel.

In other places & times where there was no Peter nearby, well leave it to the goodness & justice of God to sort it out.

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When faced with the question – “What happens to those who’ve never heard of Jesus, never heard the Gospel?”

The best response is to say, “I don’t know. I don’t because the Bible doesn’t give a definitive answer.

But what I do know is God is perfectly fair, perfectly just & perfect in love.

So I KNOW that however God deals with them it’s perfect, right, good, & just.

When all humanity stands before God and sees how He’s handled all things, there will be one unanimous declaration – God is GOOD!

V. 35 gives us much comfort in knowing that God will treat well those who look to Him.

**36 The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ— He is Lord of all—**

Peter made it clear right up front that the Gospel Cornelius had already heard rumblings of – it as all true.

Jesus, whom the Romans had crucified at the instigation of the Jewish authorities, was indeed the long awaited Messiah.

**37 that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached:**

Peter had already qualified Cornelius and knew he’d heard about the followers of Jesus.

Now he fills in the essential details of the Gospel Cornelius had only heard  
**ABOUT.**

**<sup>38</sup> how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. <sup>39</sup> And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree. <sup>40</sup> Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly, <sup>41</sup> not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, even to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. <sup>42</sup> And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead. <sup>43</sup> To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.”**

There it is – the essentials necessary to come to saving faith.

Jesus was the Redeeming Son of God whose death atones for sin and whose resurrection brings a new life.

Faith is the connector that causes the work of Christ to be efficacious (work) for the one who believes.

It's the key that opens the door to forgiveness & eternal life.

Cornelius and all there with him were following Peter's every word and giving full assent to it as it was spoken. So . . .

#### **4. They are saved 10:44-48**

**<sup>44</sup> While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. <sup>45</sup> And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. <sup>46</sup> For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter answered, <sup>47</sup> “Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” <sup>48</sup> And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days.**

God helped Peter understand His will by pouring out the Holy Spirit on these Gentiles.

The Holy Spirit's presence upon them proved He was IN them, and so born again.

Peter was probably stumped about HOW to lead them to faith.

Did they need to become Jews before they could become Christians – would be the question.

Was the NEW covenant only entered through the Old?

God showed Peter and his Jewish companions that Becoming a follower of Christ has NO other prerequisite than repentance & faith.

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Seeing that they were born again, there was no way they could be prohibited from being baptized, which was understood as being a way to give public expression



to one's faith in Christ & desire to be a part of His covenant community.

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Before we move on, please note what Peter & his friends heard when Cornelius' household was filled with the Spirit –

V. 46 – They were magnifying God! [cf. 1 Cor. 14 – tongues are *NOT* to men, they're *to* God.]

### **G. Controversy over Gentile Converts 11:1-18**

**<sup>1</sup> Now the apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God.**

“And they broke out in redolent celebration that God's grace had been extended to the hopeless.”

We would **HOPE** that would be their response, but it wasn't.

**<sup>2</sup> And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him, <sup>3</sup> saying, “You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!”**

“How shocking! How appalling! TO eat with Gentiles – how, how – unthinkable. Why you might have caught coodies Peter!”

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Notice how Luke identifies those who criticized Peter – he calls them “those of the circumcision.”

Though it's only been about 10 years since the death & resurrection of Jesus, the Church is already dividing into doctrinal factions.

It's from later debates & issues we learn what's happening here –

In the Church of Jerusalem there was a group of believers who still maintained a very rigid view of holiness and law-keeping.

There was little about being an observant Jew that they saw as incompatible with their faith in Jesus as Messiah.

For them to be godly meant keeping the Mosaic Law – all of it.

These became known as the **Judaizers**, because they maintained in order for Gentiles to become full-Christians, they must adopt Judaism, with all its rules, **including circumcision**.

It was **unthinkable** to them that Peter would open the arms of fellowship to Gentiles as he had in Caesarea by calling them to be baptized without first demanding that they submit to full conversion to Judaism.

Now, before we get all tweaked at the Judaizers, realize that while some of them were just stuffy legalists, many of them had a heart for holiness and just didn't understand yet what God was doing.

They'll get sorted out quickly enough and this whole incident with Cornelius is what will help do the sorting.

**<sup>4</sup> But Peter explained *it* to them in order from the beginning, saying: <sup>5</sup> “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. <sup>6</sup> When I observed it intently and considered, I saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. <sup>7</sup> And I heard a voice saying to me, ‘Rise, Peter; kill and eat.’ <sup>8</sup> But I said, ‘Not so, Lord! For nothing**

common or unclean has at any time entered my mouth.’<sup>9</sup> But the voice answered me again from heaven, ‘**What God has cleansed you must not call common.**’<sup>10</sup> Now this was done three times, and all were drawn up again into heaven.<sup>11</sup> At that very moment, three men stood before the house where I was, having been sent to me from Caesarea.<sup>12</sup> Then the Spirit told me to go with them, doubting nothing. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered the man’s house.<sup>13</sup> 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,<sup>14</sup> who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved.’<sup>15</sup> And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning.<sup>16</sup> 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.**’<sup>17</sup> 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?”<sup>18</sup> When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, “Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.”

There it is – they acquiesce in light of the profound and miraculous evidence. But the issue of what Gentiles have to do in order to be a part of the Church is *not* settled.

It’s going to come up again & again and prove to be a major trouble spot.

#### **H. The Church at Antioch 11:19-30**

**<sup>19</sup> 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.**

This looks back a bit to the time before what we’ve read from ch. 9 till now.

The Jewish believers who’d fled Jerusalem from the persecution that followed Stephen’s martyrdom thought the Gospel was meant for the Jews, so that’s all they shared with.

**<sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.**

Remember that a good number of those first believers who fled persecution in Jerusalem were Hellenist Jews.

They naturally sought out people of their own persuasion when they arrived in the various places they went and shared the Lord with them.

One of the places where this proved especially fruitful in conversions was the thriving Syrian city of Antioch.

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Antioch had a huge Jewish population, having been persuaded to move there a generation before the Romans by the Greek rulers.

So most of the Jews living in Antioch were thoroughly Hellenistic. It was the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest city in the Empire, an important seaport in the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Roman capital of Syria, which was considered an important holding in the East. Antioch was one of those strategic places from which the Faith could spread rapidly into the surrounding territory because of the transportation & communication hub that it was – and that’s precisely what happened. When the Church took root in Antioch, Christianity spread like wildfire throughout the region.

**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 leaders in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to check out the work in Antioch. Obviously he’d risen to a place of confidence & leadership through his faithful ministry so far. They considered him a good choice to go & make sure things were well in hand in Antioch.

When he got there, Luke says he “saw the grace of God.” What he saw was the fruit of righteousness in changed lives. Antioch was a city with a bad rep as morally loose. Bordering Antioch were sacred groves to Daphne & a shrine to Apollo where religious orgies were practiced. The populace of Antioch had become so morally corrupt it spilled over into a public life that was so chaotic it often spilled over into riots – they were prone to riotous living – LITERALLY. So much so that the Romans had to station extra troops nearby to quell the frequent outbursts.

The Christians were a whole different story. Their conversion had resulted in a holiness that marked them as distinct and different from the rest of Antioch. Barnabas knew it was only a matter of time before the holiness of the Christians came into conflict with the debauchery of the rest of Antioch and encouraged them to be serious, sober, and determined in their pursuit of God.

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

It seems Barnabas recognized how crucial the work was in Antioch and knew Saul would be a perfect fit there.

Saul, you’ll remember had been sent by the Church at Jerusalem back home to Tarsus when they became aware of a plot to kill him.

Tarsus wasn’t too far from Antioch and Barnabas felt Saul’s gifts were being wasted doing nothing in Tarsus when there were so many opportunities in Antioch.

**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.**

In Jerusalem the followers of Jesus were known by others as Nazarenes because they followed Jesus of Nazareth as He was called.

Believers referred to themselves as the people of the Way.

The label “Christian” was first applied to them in Antioch and was meant as a derisive term.

Believers wanted to be identified with Jesus Christ and indicated it by baptism.

Unbelievers said, “Okay, if you want to identify with a guy Rome deemed nothing more than a common criminal and *humiliated* him by crucifying him, great; we’ll call you by our title for him – Christians.”

It’s understandable why this title was first applied in Antioch.

No where was there a more obvious distinction in lifestyle between believers and everyone else than in Antioch where gross immorality was the norm.

In Antioch, Christian meant = Prude, uptight, straight-laced, pleasure-denying, contrarian, & idiotic.

Idiotic because who would want to voluntarily associate & identify with someone who’d been crucified?

Apart from understanding the Gospel, that made no sense at all.

## **27 And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch.**

The prophets played an important role in the early church because there was no NT yet.

So the prophets had a ministry of proclaiming God’s message to His people.

## **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 were several notable famines during the Roman Empire that came about as a result of weather & war.

One of them was so severe tens of thousands died in Rome itself.

History tells us the 13 year reign of Claudius was marked by several famines which struck different parts of the Empire.

This one Agabus foretold gripped the entire Empire and lasted for months.

The Christians were forewarned and because of it they were able to prepare.

The Antiochan church knew the believers in Jerusalem were being hard-pressed by persecution & would be unable to survive a famine so they sent relief by Barnabas & Saul.

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[1] *Aeneid* 6.314 cf. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* – Acts Pg. 384,

[2] <http://www.dermadoctor.com/pages/newsletter46.asp>  
<http://www.baldingblog.com/2005/06/17/daily-hair-loss-what-is-normal/>