



Chapter 11: The Jerusalem Ultimatum

'Who Was I to Stand in God's Way?'

WHEN:

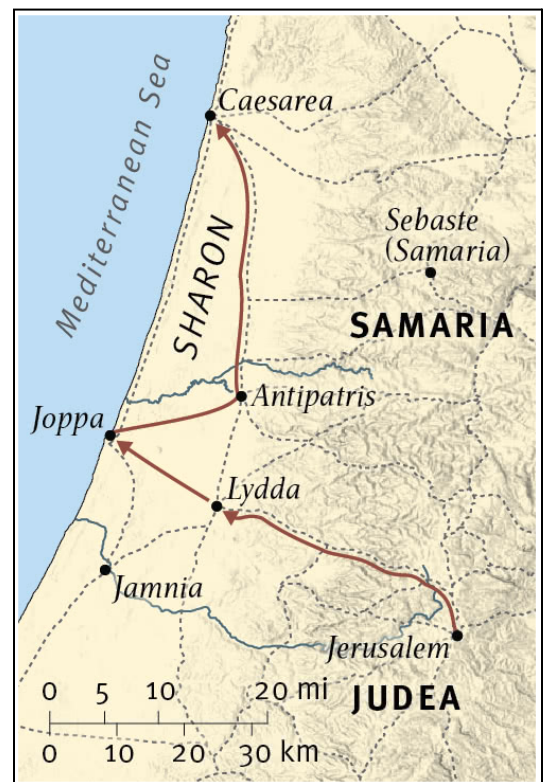
- The events of Acts 11 span several years; an approximate timeframe is 39-45 A.D.
- Emperor Claudius reigned from 41-54 A.D. (Acts 11:28)
- Famine occurred 45-47 A.D. (Acts 11:28)

WHERE:

- The chapter opens with Peter traveling from Caesarea Maritima to Jerusalem.
- Barnabas worked in the young church at Antioch of Syria.
- Barnabas traveled to Tarsus to find Saul.
- This chapter mentions a severe famine that affected the region of Judea.

CHARACTERS:

- **Peter** – One of Jesus' 12 Apostles. In chapter 10, he visited a gentile named Cornelius.
- **The Circumcision Party** – Jews who were critical of Peter's visit to Cornelius.
- **Barnabas** – A disciple, "a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith."
- **Saul** – More commonly known as Paul. A disciple living in Tarsus.
- **Agabus** – A prophet of God. He also appears in Acts 21:10.



I. Peter's Defense: God Grants Repentance to the Gentiles (11:1-18)

A. The Controversy (vv. 1-3)

1. The apostles and brothers throughout Judea hear that Gentiles have received God's word
2. Peter returns to Jerusalem → The circumcision party criticizes him

B. Peter Recounts God's Initiative (vv. 4-16)

Peter answers criticism by narrating what God did, not by arguing an abstract principle.

1. The Vision (vv. 5-10) → Peter's trance in Joppa: the sheet with unclean animals descends → God's command: "Rise, kill and eat" → Peter's refusal based on ceremonial law → God's rebuttal: "What God has made clean, do not call common" → The vision repeats three times -- echoing Jesus' threefold restoration of Peter (John 21)
2. The Summons (vv. 11-12) → Three men arrive from Caesarea at the Spirit's direction → The Spirit tells Peter to go with them, "making no distinction"
3. The Outpouring (vv. 13-16) → The Holy Spirit falls on Cornelius's household as Peter speaks → Peter recalls Jesus' words about baptism with the Holy Spirit → The same gift given to Jewish believers at Pentecost is now given to Gentiles

C. Peter's Conclusion (v. 17)

→ "If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?"

D. The Response (v. 18)

→ The critics fall silent → They glorify God: "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life."

Ephesians 2:14-16

¹⁴ For Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us. ¹⁵ He did this by ending the system of law with its commandments and regulations. He made peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new people from the two groups. ¹⁶ Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death on the cross, and our hostility toward each other was put to death.

II. The Church at Antioch: Grace Creates a New Community (11:19-26)

A. Scattered Preachers (vv. 19-21)

1. Persecution after Stephen's death scatters believers to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch
2. Initially they preach only to Jews
3. Some men from Cyprus and Cyrene begin speaking to Greeks in Antioch
4. The hand of the Lord is with them
5. A great number who believed turned to the Lord

→ Persecution becomes the engine of expansion. What men intend for evil, God uses for gospel advance. This echoes Genesis 50:20 and the pattern of redemptive history.

B. Barnabas Sent from Jerusalem (vv. 22-24)

1. Jerusalem hears the report and sends Barnabas
2. He is "a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith"
3. He sees the grace of God and is glad — not suspicious
4. He exhorts them to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose

→ Barnabas investigates with joy, not suspicion. Authenticity is marked by faithfulness and the fruit of the Spirit, not cultural conformity.

C. Barnabas and Saul Teach at Antioch (vv. 25-26)

1. Barnabas travels to Tarsus to seek Saul
2. They teach in Antioch for a whole year
3. It is in Antioch that the disciples are first called Christians



III. Famine Relief: The Gentile Church's Generosity (11:27-30)

A. The Prophecy of Agabus (vv. 27-28) → Prophets come from Jerusalem to Antioch → Agabus predicts a great famine during Claudius's reign (41-54 AD)

B. The Response (vv. 29-30)

1. The disciples in Antioch determine to send relief
2. Each contributes according to his ability
3. Barnabas and Saul deliver the offering to the elders in Judea

What does it mean that God grants repentance?

Acts 5:31

Then God put him in the place of honor at his right hand as Prince and Savior. He did this so the people of Israel would repent of their sins and be forgiven.

Acts 11:18

When the others heard this, they stopped objecting and began praising God. They said, "We can see that God has also given the Gentiles the privilege of repenting of their sins and receiving eternal life."

2 Timothy 2:25

Gently instruct those who oppose the truth. Perhaps God will change those people's hearts, and they will learn the truth.

"Repentance, contrary to popular misconception, is not a heroic first step I make toward Christ nor is it a feeling-sorry-for-my-sins. It is the divine gift of being able to be turned toward truth. Turning toward the truth about myself and my situation is quite beyond my power to accomplish. Like Cornelius, I cannot repent — turn around — on my own. So God does it for me. In Christ, God has turned toward us and 'granted,' given, us repentance."

William H. Willimon, *Acts, Interpretation,
a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*

God's Sovereignty in Salvation as Seen in Acts

God ordained the cross	God calls, adds, and appoints many to eternal life	God gives faith and repentance; God cleanses and opens hearts
2:23 "Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God" 3:18 "what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled" 4:27-28 "there were gathered together . . . Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, to do whatever your hand . . . had predestined to take place"	2:39 "the promise is to . . . everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself" 2:41 "there were added that day about three thousand souls" 2:47 "the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved" 5:14 "believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women" 11:24 "a great many people were added to the Lord" 13:48 "as many as were appointed to eternal life believed"	3:16 "the faith that is through Jesus" 5:31 "God exalted him . . . to give repentance to Israel" 11:18 "to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life" 15:8-9 "God . . . having cleansed their hearts by faith" 16:14 "The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul" 18:27 "those who through grace had believed"
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Ephesians 2:8-9

⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Next: Acts 12