



God's Newly United Family

Acts 11:1-30

Study Guide #15 for the week of
May 8, 2022

Peter Explains His Actions - [Acts 11:1-18](#)

Some questions to answer and discuss:

1. What is one family tradition you want to keep at all costs?
2. Why did the circumcised believers imply that it was wrong for Peter to eat with Gentiles? ([11:3](#))
3. How did Peter explain his actions? ([11:4-17](#))
4. How did Peter dispel the idea that the Gentiles were second-class citizens? ([11:15-17](#))
5. In what ways do we need to be less like the "circumcised believers" in our approach to others?
6. How can you be more accepting of those who don't match your values or life-style?
7. How can you open your heart and mind to others whom you tend to dislike?

Life Application Bible Notes

[11:1-3](#) A Gentile was anyone who was not a Jew. Most Jewish believers thought that God offered salvation only to the Jews because God had given his law to them ([Exodus 19-20](#)). A group in Jerusalem believed that Gentiles could be saved, but only if they followed all the Jewish laws and traditions—in essence, if they first became Jews before becoming Christians. Both groups were mistaken. God chose the Jews and taught them his laws so they could bring the message of salvation to *all* people (see [Genesis 12:3](#); [Psalm 22:27](#); [Isaiah 42:4](#); [49:6](#); [56:3-7](#); [60:1-3](#); [Jeremiah 16:19-21](#); [Zechariah 2:11](#); [Malachi 1:11](#); [Romans 15:9-12](#)).

[11:2-18](#) When Peter brought the news of Cornelius's conversion back to Jerusalem, the believers were shocked that Peter had eaten with Gentiles. After they heard the whole story, however, they praised God ([11:18](#)). Their reactions teach us how to handle disagreements with other Christians. Before judging the behavior of fellow believers, it is important to hear them out. The Holy Spirit may have something important to teach us through them.

[11:8](#) God had promised throughout Scripture that he would reach the nations. This began with his general promise to Abraham ([Genesis 12:3](#); [18:18](#)) and became very specific in Malachi's statement: "But my name is honored by people of other nations from morning till night" ([Malachi 1:11](#)). But this was an extremely difficult truth for Jews, even Jewish believers, to accept. The Jewish believers understood how certain prophecies were fulfilled in Christ, but they overlooked other Old Testament teachings. Too often we are inclined to accept only the

parts of God's Word that appeal to us and support our own agendas, ignoring the teachings we don't like. We must accept all of God's Word as absolute truth.

[11:12ff](#) Peter's defense for eating with Gentiles was a simple restatement of what happened. He brought six witnesses with him to back him up, and then he quoted Jesus' promise about the coming of the Holy Spirit ([11:16](#)). These Gentiles' lives had been changed, and that was all the evidence Peter and the other believers needed. Changed lives are an equally powerful evidence today.

[11:16](#) Jesus had also demonstrated clearly that he and his message were for all people. He had preached in Samaria ([John 4:1-42](#)); in the region of the Gerasenes, populated by Greeks ([Mark 5:1-20](#)); and he even had reached out to Romans ([Luke 7:1-10](#)). The apostles shouldn't have been surprised that they were called to do the same.

[11:18](#) The intellectual questions ended, and the theological discussion stopped with the report that God had given the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles. This was a turning point for the early church. They had to accept those whom God had chosen, even if they were Gentiles. But joy over the conversion of Gentiles was not unanimous. This continued to be a struggle for some Jewish Christians throughout the first century.

The Church in Antioch - [Acts 11:19-30](#)

Some questions to answer and discuss:

1. What do you like or dislike about traveling?
2. What was one of the results of Stephen's martyrdom? ([11:19](#))
3. What caused the news about Christ to take hold among many who heard it? ([11:21](#))
4. How did Barnabas encourage the Christians at Antioch? ([11:23](#))
5. What did the Christians do for the believers in Judea? Why? ([11:29-30](#))
6. How was Stephen's martyrdom good for the church?
7. How can you do good for someone who needs your help this week?
8. What can you do to enlarge the circle of people to whom you reach out?

Life Application Bible Notes

[11:20, 21](#) In Antioch, Christianity was launched on its worldwide mission and there the believers aggressively preached to the Gentiles (non-Jews who did not worship God). Philip had preached in Samaria, but the Samaritans were part Jewish ([8:5](#)); Peter had preached to Cornelius, but he already worshiped God ([10:2](#)). Believers who were scattered after the outbreak of persecution in Jerusalem spread the Good News to other Jews in the lands they fled to ([11:19](#)). The seeds of this missionary work had been sown after Stephen's death. At this time, the believers began actively sharing the Good News with Gentiles.

[11:22](#) With the exception of Jerusalem, Antioch of Syria played a more important role in the early church than any other city. After Rome and Alexandria, Antioch was the largest city in the Roman world. In Antioch the first Gentile church was founded, and there the believers were first called Christians ([11:26](#)). Paul used the city as his home base during his missionary journeys. Antioch was the center of worship for several pagan cults that promoted sexual

immorality and other forms of evil common to pagan religions. It was also a vital commercial center—the gateway to the eastern world. Antioch was a key city both to Rome and to the early church.

11:22-26 Barnabas presents a wonderful example of how to help new Christians. He demonstrated strong faith; he ministered joyfully with kindness and encouragement; he taught new believers further lessons about God (see [9:26-30](#)). Remember Barnabas when you see new believers, and think of ways to help them grow in their faith.

Barnabas and Saul in Antioch: Persecution scattered the believers into Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, and the gospel went with them. Most spoke only to Jews, but in Antioch, some Gentiles were converted. The church sent Barnabas to investigate, and he was pleased with what he found. Barnabas went to Tarsus to bring Saul (Paul) back to Antioch.

11:25 Saul had been sent to his home in Tarsus for protection after his conversion had caused an uproar among the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem ([9:26-30](#)). He stayed there for several years before Barnabas brought him to help the church at Antioch.

11:26 The young church at Antioch was a curious mixture of Jews (who spoke Greek or Aramaic) and Gentiles. It is significant that this is the first place where the believers were called Christians (or "Christ-ones") because all they had in common was Christ—not race, culture, or even language. Christ's love crosses all boundaries and unites all people.

11:26 Barnabas and Saul stayed at Antioch for a full year, teaching the new believers. They could have left for other cities, but they saw the importance of follow-up and training. Have you helped someone believe in Christ? Spend time teaching and encouraging that person. Are you a new believer? Remember, you are just beginning your Christian life. Your faith needs to grow and mature through consistent Bible study and teaching.

11:27, 28 Prophets were found not only in the Old Testament but also in the early church. Their role was to present God's will to the people and to instruct them in God's word. Sometimes, like Agabus, they also had the gift of predicting the future.

11:28, 29 Serious food shortages occurred during the reign of the Roman emperor Claudius (A.D. 41-54) because of a drought that had extended across much of the Roman Empire for many years. It is significant that the church in Antioch assisted the church in Jerusalem. The daughter church had grown enough to be able to help the established church.

11:29 The people of Antioch were motivated to give generously because they cared about the needs of others. This is the cheerful giving that the Bible commends ([2 Corinthians 9:7](#)). Reluctant giving reflects a lack of concern for people. Focus your concern on the needy, and you will be motivated to give.

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