

Dr. Craig Keener, Acts, Lecture 13, Acts 10-11

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This is Dr. Craig Keener in his teaching on the book of Acts. This is session 13, Acts chapters 10 and 11.

In Acts chapter 10, we come to the narrative about Cornelius, the first and lengthiest time that speaks of Cornelius.

In the previous session, we introduced some introductory material about Acts chapter 10 and verse 1, about Caesarea and about Roman military service, and about centurions as background for Cornelius. So now we are coming to chapter 10 and verse 2. He was appreciated by the Jewish people who knew him because of his almsgiving. And that's interesting because you remember in Luke chapter 7, you have a centurion who had supported the local synagogue, and Jewish people came and spoke on his behalf.

Well, in this case, it expresses devotion to God. It also expresses humbling himself culturally because following Jewish customs was considered, and was sometimes looked down upon by some other people groups. We also see here God's interest in seekers.

And there's a sense in which none of us seeks after God, but there's also a sense in which God has moved our hearts to seek after him. When I was an atheist, I actually began thinking, what if I'm wrong? What if there is a God? One of the things that prompted me in that direction, already when I was 13, I was reading Plato and thinking about what he said about the immortality of the soul and his arguments for it, especially the innate knowledge because of the pre-existence of the soul. I didn't buy, but although I didn't buy his idea of the pre-existence of the soul, the questions that he asked about immortality really disturbed me because I had to recognize I was finite, I was mortal, and I was going to die.

And the only way that I could have life that would last forever was if there was somebody who was infinite, who would choose to bestow that on me. But if there was such a being, why would that being care about me? Only if that being were perfectly loving, that would be the best of all possible things. But if that being were perfectly loving, why would that being love me? Because I certainly was not perfectly loving.

I knew I was very selfish. And the only reason that I would want to know that being was that I wanted to live forever. Well, that was the main reason that I wanted to know that being.

And when I heard the gospel, the Holy Spirit touched me and I had an encounter with Christ and was converted. And I'm grateful to God who reached out to a seeker who had no claims on him. I didn't come from a Christian home or anything like that.

This man was a God-fearer. He was much further along than I was. He was probably attending the synagogue.

He was very interested in the one true God. He recognized that this was the true God, at least the greatest God. He was not circumcised.

He was not in the category of a proselyte. He was in the category of what some Jewish people called righteous Gentiles, those who recognized their God. They didn't follow idols and they didn't practice sexual immorality.

But he hadn't become part of the covenant people. He hadn't been circumcised. This group, the God-fearers, whether by that title or by others, is attested in Josephus and Philo, very often in inscriptions, particularly in Aphrodisias in Asia Minor.

Cornelius wasn't yet a full convert to Judaism. We know that many soldiers were interested in religion and you can understand why that would be. They were interested in various religions.

Cornelius was interested in the Jewish religion. Now, it also talks in verse two about his household. He couldn't marry per se, at least not according to official Roman law.

He could unofficially marry. That would be considered a concubine under Roman law. But during your 20 years of military service, and perhaps longer if he had stayed in longer as a centurion, during your 20 years of military service or longer, you could not marry officially.

Often what was done was that after you retired, they would grant that your concubine would count as a wife, provided you had only one. So soldiers that got moved around a lot, centurions even more probably, who got moved around a lot, had to normally marry the most recent concubine that they had had because they couldn't take their concubines with them when the army moved. In Caesarea, however, we know that the troops begged not to be moved when they were being punished later on.

So, they were very attached to their local area, as many troops in areas where there wasn't a war going on were. We don't know if he was married or not or had a concubine or not. Some people think that he was also a retired centurion and that's why he has an official Roman name, even though it's an auxiliary unit.

But then again, as a centurion, he may have been lent from the legion and he may have been a Roman citizen already because he is able to send a soldier as well as servants. So, he's probably still got some influence. Then again, we also know that the discipline was lax around Caesarea.

And so perhaps as a former centurion, he could hire an off-duty soldier. We don't know a lot of the details, but in any case, he does seem to have had some relatives there, maybe because he was recruited locally or maybe because he had a concubine and these were his relatives, maybe a wife if he was retired and these were his relatives. In verse 24, it speaks of relatives.

And the term there, in contrast to the term household, means those who are related to him genetically or related to his wife genetically, not simply servants who could be considered part of the household. Wives were supposed to share their husband's religion, so it didn't always happen. But often when the husband would convert, the wife would convert, and the household would convert too.

We don't know what the household here meant. Maybe it could mean servants, maybe it could mean freed persons. In verse 7, you could have that as well because once a servant was freed, the former slaveholder owed social obligations to the freed person to help them advance in society and so forth.

The freed person owed certain social obligations to the former slaveholder as part of the slaveholder's extended family. Well, the most inexpensive of slaves was about one-third of a regular soldier's annual pay. But centurions made 15 times the pay of rank-and-file soldiers.

And the highest-paid centurion in a legion could make 60 times as much. Well, as a centurion, perhaps probably just a regular centurion, he may make 15 times the pay of rank-and-file soldiers. Verse 3 says that this happens, he's praying at around 3 p.m. Now that was the time of Jewish evening prayer.

So, he's actually even praying during the regular hours of prayer. He has a vision. And interestingly, Peter also has a vision.

This is later, but it's when it's the next day apparently, but it's not when it's not simultaneous with Cornelius, but it's also not dependent on Cornelius' vision. It's independent. It's divinely coordinated.

Well, in verse 9, they travel to reach Peter from Caesarea to Joppa. Caesarea was about 30 miles north of Joppa. So, even if they leave immediately after 3 p.m., they would either have to travel all night on foot or they would have to travel on horses to be approaching Joppa by noon.

So, they view this as an urgent mission. Imagine what would have happened if Peter had had to take a lot of time to figure out what to do or if Peter had just sent them away. But God, who said to check with Peter, who was staying with Simon the Tanner, also arranged for Peter to know what he was supposed to do.

Peter went up on the rooftop to pray. Well, they had flat rooftops. They were often used for drying vegetables.

They could be used for private prayer or whatever. If he was under a canopy, it could be cooler even at midday than most homes were in Judea. But this isn't a regular hour prayer.

Peter just likes to pray or feels like praying. That was a good thing. But in verse 10, we find out that they're preparing food for him, but he's hungry apparently.

Noon was a normal time for a meal, at least in some places. We know it was in Rome. Well, then he has this vision, a vision in verses 14 through 16 of a very horrifying diet.

You can think of what food would be most horrifying to you in your culture or your own palate. For Peter, culturally, there were certain things that he would never eat. In chapter 10 in verse 12, the animals that are let down in the sheet include clean animals, that is those they were allowed to eat according to Leviticus 11, and also unclean animals.

The problem is if they were mixed together, it made them all unclean. And so virtually these are unclean animals. And Peter protests.

And the scene is very much like what you have in Ezekiel 4, 13 through 15, where God tells Ezekiel to prepare this food over human dung. And he says, God, that's unclean. And God hears his protest and says, okay, you can cook it over cow's dung instead.

Well, in this case, Peter says, God, I've never eaten anything unclean. I mean, he's willing to stay with the tanner, but you only go so far. The Maccabees were prepared to die rather than to eat unclean food.

So, this was one of the boundary markers, as scholars often say, of Jewish ethnicity. There were certain things that became crucial distinctives of Judaism in part because these were things that their ancestors had had to die to resist. But God is the one who declared the things unclean to begin with, and God can declare anything clean, including, as we see later on is the lesson of this in 10:28 and 15:9, including Gentiles.

God can cleanse Gentiles. He can make them unclean. Well, Peter gets this vision.

Meanwhile, the messengers of Cornelius are on their way to him. In 10:17 through 23a, Peter and Simon's household receive Gentiles. Well, how did they find Peter in verse 17? Joppa was a large town, but they'd been told to find him.

Simon the tanner. Well, tanners would normally be near water, and they would be in the tanning district, because that was the district that stank, one of the districts that stank most. And so, people would be together to do that rather than scattered throughout the town.

Well, once you get there, you just ask for directions. That's what people did. But where's Simon the tanner? Simon was a common name, but apparently, there weren't a whole lot of tanners named Simon there.

So, it says that they come to the outer gate. Well, if he has an outer gate, he's a man of some means. He has some wealth, which helps him to have room to have Peter staying with him.

Then in verses 18 through 22, well, they call out. Why did they call out and not just go into the gate? Well, for one thing, it's a matter of propriety, but for another thing, they're unclean. They're not allowed to enter a Jewish home.

And Simon may be a tanner, but he's surely Jewish. I mean, given the fact that Peter has some problems cleaning the Gentile homes, clearly this is Simon the Tanner is Jewish. We see here the role of the Holy Spirit.

First of all, we see Peter's vision. But secondly, in 10:19, while he's trying to think about what this vision could mean, the Holy Spirit says, there are some men that I've sent to you, go with them. It's very similar to what we see in chapter eight in verse 29, where the Spirit says to Philip, go, join yourself to this chariot.

After an angel has already given him some direction, the Spirit gives him the immediate direction. We can trust the Spirit to lead us in our lives, but there are some things that the Spirit especially likes to speak about. Luke especially likes to emphasize this crossing of barriers, how the Spirit leads us to reach other people groups and to reach Gentiles.

So, Luke emphasizes the role of the Spirit in this particular way. And sometimes the Spirit will do dramatic things. I remember one time I was walking and there was a young man in front of me, maybe a block in front of me.

And the Spirit urged me, call out his name, and gave me his name. And I was like, is that really his name? I should have called out to him. I just ran up to him and said, hi, I'm Craig.

And he said his name, which was the name the Holy Spirit said. And I said, oh, I should have called it out. But anyway, that was my first try.

But Peter and Philip, fortunately, obeyed in the first time. I did get to share Christ with them. And I did tell him that the Holy Spirit had told me that, and he did believe me.

But in any case, so Peter went down. This would probably be down an outside staircase leading from the flat roof. Sometimes they had ladders, but remember if this guy has an outer gate, he surely has a staircase.

Verse 23a, well, they let the Gentiles stay with them overnight. Pharisees were concerned about impure table fellowship, but they showed proper hospitality. They feed them and they lodge them overnight.

Tanner may be less concerned with strict rules and Joppa was a mixed town. So, he probably knew Gentiles and so on, especially if the Tanning district, it's not just Jewish tanners, but other tanners may all be in the area rather than much of the town being segregated. But in any case, but this was a problem, especially for the stricter members.

We'll see that when we get to chapter 15 in verse five, some Pharisees have also become believers and they still adhere to their strict policies and this becomes an issue for them. So, at this point, it's not an issue because word hasn't gotten around, but word will soon get around what's about to happen next. 10.23b through 33, Cornelius receives Peter.

So, the hospitality is going to go both ways. 10.23b, Peter takes extra companions. He takes six men with him.

So, there's seven of them. Well, we've seen that number before, but why does he take six men with him? Well, he wants to have witnesses for whatever happens that they didn't do anything wrong. Deuteronomy 17.6 in 1915, you have to have at least two or three witnesses and Peter's going to have double the full number.

But in 10:24, they left around sunrise. It's 30 miles. The fact that the text says they arrived the following day apparently means that they stayed overnight along the way, verse 30.

They probably stayed in a mixed town, perhaps Apollonia, which was just under half the way there. And then we come to verses 25 and 26. Now, Cornelius may be a God-fearer, but he gives homage to Peter as if he were divine.

Pagans offered this to others. We see in 14:11 that people from Lystra try to do that to Barnabas and Paul. In 28:6, we see that some of the local residents in Malta think that Paul is a God.

So, he offers this homage. He may not mean it as divine. He may just mean it as the way to greet a representative of someone who's divine or a king.

In the East, people would often bow before kings, although it depended on what people group you were from. Some people wouldn't be willing to do that. But in 10.27 through 29, we read Peter's response.

Peter first discourages Cornelius's bowing down to him. He refuses divine homage, which was considered the appropriate behavior, even by Gentiles. That was the appropriate behavior unless you were the emperor.

You were supposed to discourage people from bowing down before you. Well, in 27 to 29, Peter explains, devout Jews would not enter idolaters' homes. And even though Cornelius is probably not an idolater, this apparently extended to any Gentile's home.

And as far as you would know in advance, I mean, this may be an idolater. Although by the time Peter's been talking with the people who were sent along the way, you would probably know that that's not the case. But it was unclean to eat their food or to drink their wine.

Cornelius may not be an idolater, but he did bow down to him. But Peter says, you know, this is considered unclean. This prevented dining together at banquets.

So normally Jewish people and Gentiles didn't banquet together. And for that reason, Gentiles thought Jewish people to be antisocial. It wasn't the Jewish people's fault.

It just was, you know, God had set up those rules in Leviticus 11, it partly says, so that he could keep them separate from the nations. But now God is transcending that because he's sending them to the nations, the Jewish believers in Jesus as witnesses. Well, 10.34 to 43, we read about Peter's message.

Are we as ready to preach as Peter was? If we want to be as sensitive to the Holy Spirit as Peter was, we need to be willing to get over our own prejudices. In verse 38, he talks about Jesus doing good, that is being a benefactor. The Greek wording there is what was used for benefactors.

We talked about that earlier. That language was often used by rulers. It was often used for deities.

And Jesus had been just doing good for people. It says how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth. In Luke chapter 4, Jesus quotes Isaiah 61 with reference to him being anointed with the Holy Spirit to fulfill this mission, which of course, as we noted in Acts chapter 2, Acts chapters 1 and 2 is also a model for the church.

Although it doesn't use the language of anointing, we're not the Christ. Some other parts of the New Testament do use that language, but we are empowered by the Spirit. In 10:42, in most of Judaism, God himself is the judge, but here Jesus is the supreme judge.

Also, in verse 36, Lord of all, that was certainly divine terminology, although it was also used for the emperor. And now Peter is preaching to somebody who is in the service of the emperor. In verse 43, all the prophets have testified of forgiveness through God's grace in the Messiah.

Well, probably he's meaning that in a general sense of the prophets talking about the messianic restoration in the era to come, the time of salvation. And so he reads the prophets in the same way, sort of that Stephen did in Acts chapter 7, and that Luke does throughout Luke-Acts. That is understanding, as Jesus was explaining the road to Emmaus, and as Jesus was explaining to his disciples later on in Luke chapter 24, that all the law and the prophets talk about him because the principles point to him.

They're ultimately fulfilled in him. 10:44 to 48, we encounter saved Gentiles, which is really going to shake up the church in Jerusalem. Are we ready to learn not just from the example of Peter and others, but from God's own activity? Well, Peter had to learn from that.

In verse 44, his sermon is interrupted. That was a common literary device. If the person had finished saying everything that needed to be said, as far as the author was concerned, they could be interrupted.

However, it was also a common device or a common feature of real life. People regularly interrupted speakers. In this case, it's not a person interrupting the speaker, though.

It's the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit fell on all those who were listening to Peter. And we read in verses 45 through 47 about the response of Peter and those who were with him.

Well, and the prophets, the outpouring of the Spirit was for Israel only. Well, the Samaritans, weren't really considered part of the people of Israel, but the disciples were able to get over that. I mean, you know, they worshiped the one God and so on.

And they were sort of Israel. They were halfway in between Israel and the Gentiles. But this eschatological promise of the outpouring of the Spirit, that was for Israel, Ezekiel 36, Isaiah 44, and so on.

Peter had quoted Joel about the Spirit being poured out on all flesh, but Peter undoubtedly assumed that that meant on all Jewish flesh. I mean, the context of the passage is about the restoration of God's people. So here they're shocked.

God is pouring out the Spirit on these Gentiles, treating them as if they're God's people. Most Jewish teachers in this period thought that if the Spirit was available at all in the current time, this is not the Dead Sea Scrolls, but other Jewish teachers, most Jewish teachers felt that the Spirit would be available only to the very most pious and usually not even to them. It was said that of Hillel's generation, Hillel was worthy of receiving the Holy Spirit, but the Spirit still didn't come upon him because his generation was not worthy of someone who had the Spirit.

Well, obviously the Christians have been experiencing something very different. They've been experiencing the outpouring of the Spirit, but they did not expect this to happen to the Gentiles. And they note, well, this is the same gift that was given to us.

It says, for they heard them speaking in other tongues. Now, does that mean the tongues is always happening when people receive the Spirit? Well, it's not mentioned in chapter 8 and verse 15, and that's why people have argued it both ways. But in this case, it does confirm that these people have received the Spirit in the same way that they did in the day of Pentecost.

In other words, well, this is what happened to us when we received the Spirit, the same thing has happened to them. So, it also would signify the same thing that it did on the day of Pentecost, that these people are now empowered to cross cultural barriers as witnesses for Christ, which means that these Gentiles will now become partners in ministry. These Gentiles will also carry forth the word of the Lord.

And this is the proper way to do a mission. We share the good news with people, but once they hear the good news, we don't minister to them in a paternalistic way, but we minister together as God's servants, all of us together. Tongues is mentioned in chapter 19 and verse 6, plus prophecy, which makes sense.

Both praise and prophecy together in the Old Testament often reflected the Spirit's inspiration. So as is often in Luke-Acts, starting with Luke chapter 1 and Luke chapter 2, with Simeon, with Zechariah, with the prophecy by John the Baptist, the Spirit often inspires prophetic speech. And of course, that's how Peter speaks of it in Acts chapter 2, verses 17 and 18.

It's not always expressed in the same way in every passage in Luke-Acts, but most often it's expressed in some sort of inspired speech, which makes sense because the particular emphasis Luke is laying on the Spirit in Luke-Acts, especially is the outpouring of the Spirit to enable us to speak for God. And if that's going to be the ultimate expression of it, well, at least often we may expect it to happen even when we initially experience this empowerment. But sooner or later, obviously, we will, because that's the point of this empowerment of the Spirit.

1048, baptism in that culture was a public declaration of conversion, but they didn't circumcise them first. Why? Because they recognize that if God has already accepted these people as members of the covenant community, as part of the people of God, because that was promised in the Old Testament prophets, God would pour out his Spirit. Well, if they've already received the greater baptism in the Spirit, how much more ought they to receive merely the water baptism that pointed to the baptism of the Spirit? So, they give them that.

As far as circumcision, they don't need to circumcise them because God has already welcomed them. They end up lodging with these Gentiles. That would compound the offense, but it would also reinforce the lesson that they were crossing these barriers and that God had declared them clean.

Now in chapter 11, verses 1 through 18, Peter gets called on the carpet. Yes, he was the chief apostle, but still, he was part of the leadership team. He wasn't the only one.

And so, he gets called on the carpet by apostles and elders back in Jerusalem when he returns. Obviously, news would spread quickly from Caesarea to Jerusalem. People were often traveling.

God's way is different from our way. For God, people are the priority. And sometimes that may offend church traditions, just like it offended the Pharisees.

Here, it's going to offend the religious sensibilities of the Christians. So, in chapter 11, verses 2 and 3, circumcision was necessary to fully convert to Judaism. Not everybody thought you needed it to be saved.

Only the most conservative Jewish people thought you needed it to be saved, although some did think that. But for most Jewish people, it was necessary. Well, virtually all Jewish people believed it was necessary if you wanted to convert to Judaism if you wanted to become part of the people of God.

So, for Peter to lodge with these Gentiles and to eat with these Gentiles offended the religious sensibilities of the more conservative members of the community. And that

was a natural inference from Genesis 17. And remember Genesis 17, you have to circumcise your household, circumcise all the servants.

Everybody had to be circumcised if they were to be part of this people. Anybody who wasn't circumcised would be cut off. But what if circumcision is a mark of the covenant, was only a mark pointing to the real meaning of the covenant? And if God had spiritually circumcised people in such a way that the marker became superfluous because God had shown that he had accepted these as members of his covenant people by giving them his own spirit, eschatologically that promise of the spirit had now been fulfilled.

So, they were charging, you ate with ritually unclean Gentiles. And Peter himself had had a problem with that back in 1028. Later on, so as not to offend the more conservative members of the community, in Galatians 2:12, we read that Peter didn't eat with uncircumcised Gentiles.

He was willing to do it on his own, but not when some other Christians came who were sent by James and were concerned with being a witness within their more conservative Jewish community. And he didn't want to offend them. He didn't want to cause them to stumble.

But Paul said, you know, Paul himself didn't want people to stumble. But in this case, this was a matter of the gospel showing that we receive these people as full brothers and sisters. Chapter 11, verses 16 through 17, receiving somebody as full brothers and sisters, table fellowship was a form of covenant relationship.

11, 16, and 17. Peter says, look, God told me to go. And also, God baptized them in the Holy Spirit, the same way as he did with us.

This is the eschatological covenant reality to which outward circumcision merely pointed. So that's why we did baptism as an act of conversion because God had already accepted their conversion. You know, one of the convincing rhetorical arguments that orators sometimes used in antiquity was the argument from necessity.

And one of the strongest arguments from necessity, where it was, I had to do this, I had no other choice, was divine necessity. God told me to do it. Well, basically, that's what Peter says here.

Now, many of us have heard that abuse. God told me to do it. And it isn't really true.

But in this case, Peter has the evidence. He has the witnesses. God told me to do it.

And God accepted their conversion by pouring out his spirit. The same spirit that moved them to cross cultural barriers is the same spirit who confirmed that this was his mission that he was in it and that he was welcoming Gentiles without requiring them to be circumcised, without requiring them to become ethnically Jewish. Now, many believed that righteous Gentiles who kept the seven laws given to Noah, or in earlier tradition, it may not have been seven, but in earlier tradition, in any case, these basic laws given to all the Gentiles, no idolatry, no sexual immorality, and so on.

Many believed that they were saved, but nobody believed this made Gentiles members of the covenant people. And yet we can see how conservative the church in Jerusalem was because they respond in verse 18, Wow, even the Gentiles, God is giving them eternal life. Even the Gentiles, God allows them to be saved.

At this point, Luke transitions to the ministry in Antioch, and he introduces this fairly briefly. We see that there were a lot of people actually involved in reaching the Gentiles, but Luke is focused on the major figures. So he doesn't spend a lot of time talking about the individuals here.

But the ministry at Antioch, the church has now moved from rural Galilee to urban Jerusalem, to cosmopolitan Antioch, multicultural Antioch. So very quickly, the church is transitioning culturally and socially in a wide variety of ways. Partly this was because they were scattered from persecution.

Partly I believe this is because the Holy Spirit was enabling them to do this, where God often moves us into unexpected situations, situations that we weren't actually culturally prepared for to begin with. But he gives us the preparation. You can think of Jackie Pullinger in Hong Kong, or David Wilkerson going from rural Pennsylvania to New York City.

You can think of Adoniram Judson or others, Hudson Taylor, others who culturally, William Carey, although he didn't go as far maybe as Hudson Taylor, but identifying with the local culture and becoming part of the local culture and today's missions movements in India and Africa, in other places where Christians are transitioning from their own culture to other cultures as they share the gospel, sometimes from urban settings to rural settings as well. Well, rapid transition was rare in terms of cultural transition. And so, this shows great flexibility.

Most movements didn't move from rural to urban and cosmopolitan this quickly. But Judaism had already adapted to these various settings over the centuries. You had Jewish culture in Gentile cities.

They still had their own communities within these Gentile cities, but they had adapted. They had learned how to speak the cultural language that surrounded them to a great extent. And that provided a conduit for the Christians.

There were already some ways that helped them to learn the new culture. Do we feel comfortable moving into new ministry settings? When God moves us, we need to be ready to move. We also need to exercise cultural flexibility and learn from the people among whom we move so that we can best minister among them and minister with them if they're already believers.

1119, there were large Jewish communities in Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch. As the diaspora Jewish believers are scattered through Saul's persecution, they go to these different places. This probably includes Barnabas initially, although he can go back to Jerusalem after the persecution has died down.

In fact, we know that Barnabas was there to introduce Saul to the apostles, or some of the apostles. So, these were natural places for them to settle after being spread abroad in chapter 8 verses 1 through 4. In chapter 11, verses 20 and 21, you have some of these Jewish believers in Jesus who are already from the diaspora and begin to make a new kind of transition. He says believers from Cyprus and Cyrene.

This would include people like Barnabas, Lucius of Cyrene, and probably Simon of Cyrene was also one of them. His sons are known to the church probably in Rome, where in Mark chapter 15, Simon of Cyrene is introduced as the father of Alexander and Rufus. So, Mark's audience already knows his children and Rufus might be the same Rufus that we have listed in Romans chapter 16.

That's not for sure, but it's a legitimate possibility. In any case, these believers are spread abroad and particularly the ones from Cyprus and Cyrene begin speaking also to Hellenists. Well, we read earlier about Hellenists.

I mean, these Jewish believers themselves were Hellenists. What does it mean they were speaking to Hellenists? It's contrasted with Jews. So, in this case, it doesn't mean Hellenistic Jews, but it means Greeks or Hellenized Syrians who had adopted Greek culture.

They shared a larger language and culture through Hellenism and that provided a bridge point through which they could reach them. Hellenistic Judaism formed a natural bridge for reaching these people and they began reaching Gentiles. That may have been before Peter.

We don't know because the narrative was following Peter already at that point, but certainly, it was spreading more widely than what Peter had done. In Peter's case,

the Jerusalem church could view it as an exception. In the case of Antioch, Antioch was pretty far away from Jerusalem.

They may have gotten away with a few things that the Jerusalem church may have looked askance at if they were a bit closer. But in any case, Antioch on the Orontes in Syria was often called Antioch on the Orontes because there were a number of kings named Antiochus who liked to start cities named after themselves or to name existing cities after themselves even. So, there were a lot of Antiochs.

We'll read about another Antioch later on in chapter 13. But this was the big Antioch. This was probably the third largest urban center of antiquity, Mediterranean antiquity anyway, after Rome and Alexandria.

The number of residents is usually estimated between 100,000 and 600,000, probably somewhere toward the higher end of that, 300,000 or 400,000 at least. Third or some say possibly the fourth largest city in the empire, probably third. It was the headquarters of Rome's Syrian Legion.

So, you had 6,000 troops quartered there. It was a brief river journey from there to Seleucia, which was its Mediterranean port city. And sailing from there, Cyprus was the closest place you could go.

Religiously, Antioch was within walking distance of the famous cult center of Apollo. So, there were a lot of Jews there, but it also was a predominantly pagan city. They had many mystery cults there.

It was known for its pagan religious diversity. It was very pluralistic, upwardly mobile, many upwardly mobile people, and many upwardly mobile Jewish people who were usually accepted. There was a bit of prejudice against Jews in Antioch after the Judean-Roman War, but the Jewish community there didn't get massacred like in some other places further south, closer to Judea.

There were a lot of God-fears there, a lot of proselytes there. We read about one earlier in Acts. It was far less segregated than Alexandria.

In Alexandria, you had Egyptians, Greeks, and Jews living in usually separate parts of the city, with Greeks wanting to be the only ones who were truly citizens of the city. Antioch was more cosmopolitan. There was more acceptance of different cultures there.

Some more liberal diaspora Jews used the best in pagan philosophy to witness. They'd already been making those cultural adaptations. Circumcision was a lesser issue in some of these places, including Antioch.

We read about another location where the king of Ediabon, the person who led him to believe in Judaism, didn't think he needed to be circumcised. He said, no, that would probably be too offensive to your people. Don't do it.

Then another person came along and said, you hypocrite. If you're really going to convert to Judaism, you have to go all the way and be circumcised. He did it.

The other Jewish people who were around him were scared that it was going to create a backlash. It did offend a lot of people, but there wasn't a revolt or anything. Not everybody insisted on everybody being circumcised.

But to be fully part of the people of God, traditional Jewish people would insist on that. Chapter 11, verses 22 through 24. Now we're coming back to one of the main characters, Barnabas, who was actually introduced back in chapter four.

Luke likes to introduce people in advance when he has the opportunity. Barnabas trusted God's work in people. He did that with Saul in chapter nine and verse 27, when he took him and introduced him to the apostles, or gathering from Galatians, some of the apostles.

In 1537 to 1539, when he and Paul split up because Barnabas wants to take Mark with him and give him a second chance, Barnabas trusted God's work in people. That was something that Judaism had a tradition of valuing as well. They talked about Hillel, who was one of the major sages.

Hillel and Shammai were leaders of the two schools of Pharisaism. The Hillelites, who prevailed after Jerusalem's destruction, looked back on Hillel as somebody who was very Gentile and took Gentiles where they were at and helped them to follow Jewish ways. Paul was more critical.

God used Paul and Paul's personality in dramatic ways too. We have different personalities and God can use our different personalities. That's not an excuse to be too hard-edged with the wrong parts of our personalities.

Martin Luther, God used him greatly, but sometimes he spoke very harshly, especially in his later years, in ways that most Protestants wouldn't agree with today, most Lutherans today wouldn't agree with. Luther said, well, God made me a weapon. God made me this way.

That may be true. He needed to be somebody who could stand firm, but sometimes he went too far, like burning down their synagogues and things like that. That was a bit extreme.

Most of us have those weaknesses. We need to watch out for them. But in any case, Barnabas, his strength, one of his strengths was that he trusted God's work in people and he welcomed people.

This provides a good example for us. In 11:25, he realizes he needs somebody to help. They're winning so many people to Christ in Antioch.

They're winning Gentiles to Christ now. And hmm, whom can I get to help? Well, Jerusalem was a long way off, remember? But Tarsus was a hundred miles to the north. That's a long way off, but it's not nearly as far off as Jerusalem at this point.

And he knows that Paul was sent off to Tarsus. He was there back in Acts chapter nine. And he also knows what God did for Paul.

He knows Paul's calling. Ah, this is to be an agent to reach the Gentiles. Who better to get than somebody who already had this calling? So, he goes north to Tarsus and finds Paul and brings him back to just this key place where the very thing God had called Paul to do is happening.

Barnabas is good at connecting people like he connected Paul with Peter and James. 11:26, the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. I keep using the name Christian, but actually, in the New Testament, that's not a very common name for followers of Jesus.

It's a nickname here. The other place where it appears, well, it appears later on in Acts also one time, it appears as a legal charge in 1 Peter 4:16, if any of you is charged as a Christian. How did they get this nickname? Well, it seems to have been on the analogy with the way people described political parties.

Partisans of Caesar were called Caesareans. Partisans of Herod were Herodians. Partisans of Pompeii were Pompeians.

The people of Antioch were known for making fun of people. Christians in the second century, however, adopted this label with pride. So, it originally started as a nickname, but we can use it.

We are partisans of Jesus, who is the true king. And even if people meant it to make fun of us, we can own that title. We belong to Jesus, the true king.

In 11:27, while Paul and Barnabas were ministering in Antioch, prophets came from Jerusalem. Now, early Christianity was very distinctive in this regard. You had Greek oracles at cultic centers, but you don't have any other prophetic movements like what we find in the New Testament.

What we see in the New Testament is more like what you see maybe in 1 Samuel 19, where you have the prophets prophesying and Samuel presiding over them. Or in 2 Kings 2 and 4, where you have the sons of the prophets and Elisha is helping to disciple them. Probably Elijah had disciplined many of the earlier prophets.

We have entire prophetic movements so that here, in the case of Acts, we read about these prophets who travel together, who come from Jerusalem to Antioch, which is a long distance. Some people have spoken of wandering prophets, but mobility was frequent in antiquity. So, what is really distinctive about this is just that you have groups of prophets.

And even, of course, Acts 2:17-18, where the spirit of prophecy empowers us all to declare the word of the Lord about Jesus. This is distinctive. It speaks of an outpouring of the spirit that nobody else in antiquity actually expected in their own time to this degree.

The Essenes came closest and it wasn't anything close to this degree. Chapter 11 and verse 28, well, what do the prophets talk about? One of the main things that they talk about is famine. And this came to pass, Luke says, in the time of Claudius.

Well, actually, it was a series of famines. It was very serious that devastated agriculture during Claudius's reign. There were high grain prices attested in the year 46.

By 51, you have a grain shortage in Rome so that the emperor Claudius is mobbed in the streets. During this period, some Jewish people or sympathizers with Judaism wanted to help the poor in Jerusalem because the famine was very severe in Judea, especially around the years 45 and 46. So Queen Helena of Adiabene, this is from the next generation.

We talked about the king of Adiabene becoming a believer in Judaism. Queen Helena of Adiabene bought Egyptian grain for large sums because it was very expensive due to the famine. People in Egypt were hungry too.

She bought large sums of food to help the people in Judea. Well, the believers in Antioch hear that this famine is going to be happening around the world, and they realize that the believers in Judea, many of them are poor. In Antioch, people tended to, well, at least many of the believers tended to be more upwardly mobile.

And so, they send relief. Now keep in mind that the prophecy said that this would be a famine throughout the world. So, the famine was going to affect Antioch too.

So even though they had more resources, this was an act of sacrifice. And it tells us something. It tells us that the believers didn't just respect their fellow believers and

care for their fellow believers locally as in Acts 2:44 and 45, or in Acts 4:32-35. That also can be cross-cultural famine relief.

This can be famine relief abroad. Today we often have situations like that where famine strikes particular areas. God has given enough resources to the church worldwide that the church somewhere can help the church somewhere else.

And in their time of need, maybe the church elsewhere will also help them. We are one body in Christ, and we must work together. And Paul brings out all these points in 2 Corinthians 8-9.

Paul also was particularly raising funds for the church in Judea. Part of the reason is, as he says, they were poor. Another part of the reason that he also gave was that he said, we Gentiles owe it to them.

They gave us the gospel. He was working for ethnic reconciliation because there was a bit of tension between the Judean churches and the churches of the diaspora over certain issues, particularly the circumcision of Gentiles. Well, most Jewish relief efforts were local except for what Helena did.

So, this was an exceptional idea, but it's one, again, we find elsewhere in the New Testament. Multi-provincial organizations were suspect in the empire. So, it didn't go over too well with the empire to have people sharing things from one place to another.

But that's what the church did. They were prepared in advance for this famine through prophecy. Well, you may remember Genesis 41, that God warned in advance of the coming famine in the world of that day, Egypt and Canaan, the surrounding region.

And God used Joseph to prepare them. And in the same way, there were these prophets and the church in Antioch responded with wisdom to that. In chapter 12, we will look at Peter's deliverance in the next lesson.

This is Dr. Craig Keener in his teaching on the book of Acts. This is session 13, Acts chapters 10 and 11.