

With Sister Paulette Morrison on January 9, 2022

Discovering the Power of the Word

A Reading and Listening Session Recap

Acts 11



On January 9, 2022, we explore Acts 11 to discover rich lessons on faith, community, and the growing reach of the Gospel. These verses remind us of caring for one another, the strength of the Holy Spirit, and the steady movement of God's Word. Grab your Bible, settle in, and join the journey.

Persecution and Proclamation (Acts 11:19)

Our story begins amidst adversity. Acts 11:19 tells us, "Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews." The early church faced intense persecution, forcing believers to flee Jerusalem. But even in their scattering, they carried the seed of the Gospel. Notice their initial focus: preaching primarily to the *Jews*. This highlights the rootedness of the early church in its Jewish heritage, and the initial commitment to sharing the message within their own community.

The Hand of the Lord & The Good News (Acts 11:21-22)

Verses 21 and 22 reveal a turning point: "And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch." The *'hand of the Lord'* signifies divine intervention and blessing. Many people, drawn by the power of the Gospel, embraced faith in Jesus. The church in Jerusalem, hearing the *'good news'* (or *tidings*) of this burgeoning faith community in Antioch, sent Barnabas, a trusted and respected leader, to investigate and support them. *'Tidings'* is a good description of how news of the events spread.

A Good Man Full of the Holy Ghost (Acts 11:24)

Acts 11:24 describes Barnabas: "for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord." Barnabas was more than just a messenger; he was a man of exemplary character, *filled with the Holy Spirit* and unwavering faith. His presence and ministry further fueled the growth of the church in Antioch, demonstrating the transformative power of a life surrendered to God.

A Year of Teaching (Acts 11:25-26)

The narrative continues: "So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians." Barnabas recognized the potential in Saul (later known as Paul) and sought him out to co-labor in ministry. Together, they spent a year teaching the believers in Antioch, solidifying their faith and laying a strong foundation. It was in Antioch that the followers of Jesus were first called *'Christians'*, marking a significant shift in identity and recognition.

Caring and Relief in Judea (Acts 11:29)

The final verse we'll focus on tonight, Acts 11:29, reveals the compassionate heart of the Antioch church: "So the disciples determined, everyone according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea." Moved by a prophetic warning of an impending famine, the believers in Antioch, driven by genuine *'caring'*, generously contributed to provide *'relief'* for their brothers and sisters in Judea. This act of tangible love demonstrates the practical outworking of their faith and their commitment to supporting one another in times of need.

Discussion: Faith and Surprise (Acts 12:13-16)

Let's consider a related passage, Acts 12:13-16, where Peter is miraculously released from prison. When he arrives at the house where believers are gathered in prayer, a servant girl named Rhoda answers the door. She recognizes Peter's voice but, overcome with joy and disbelief, rushes back to tell the others. They dismiss her claim, thinking she's out of her mind. Even when Peter continues knocking, they struggle to believe it's really him. This passage highlights the tension between faith and expectation. While the believers were praying for Peter's release, they were simultaneously surprised when their prayers were answered. How often do we find ourselves in a similar situation, praying for God's intervention but struggling to fully believe that He will act? What does this reveal about the nature of our faith, and the limitations of our expectations?

Reflections

As we conclude, let's reflect on the key takeaways from Acts 11:

- **The power of the Word:** Even in the face of persecution, the Word of God spread and transformed lives.
- **The importance of community:** The church in Antioch exemplified unity, generosity, and mutual support.
- **The role of the Holy Spirit:** The Holy Spirit empowered believers like Barnabas to minister effectively and build up the church.

- **The interplay of faith and action:** The believers in Antioch demonstrated their faith through tangible acts of love and service.

May we be inspired by their example to embrace the power of the Word, cultivate strong communities of faith, and live out our beliefs with compassion and generosity.