

# **ANTIOCH BIBLE CLASS**

## **LESSON SUBJECT**

# **THE CHURCH EMBRACES GENTILES**

## **SCRIPTURE TEXT: ACTS 11: 1-30**

**MEMORY VERSE: ACTS 11:18.** When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.

## **INTRODUCTION TO LESSON.**

Peter has returned from a world-changing experience in Caesarea, but already the news of him preaching to the Gentiles has reached the Jerusalem area. They of the circumcision contend with him, accusing him of going in to the uncircumcised and eating with them, contrary to the law. Peter rehearsed with them the entire event, from his own powerful visions to that also of Cornelius, and especially how that God gave them the Holy Ghost the same as “on us at the beginning”. “Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on Christ, what was I, that I could withstand God”? In other words, you can fight it but God is the one that did it. Fortunately, after hearing Peter’s testimony, corroborated by the other six brethren who went with him to Caesarea, they saw that God had granted repentance to the Gentiles.

Meanwhile, the persecution after Stephen’s death, had caused disciples to scatter afar, to places like Phenice, Cyprus and Antioch. These scattered disciples preached Christ, but only to the Jews. In Antioch, the Lord was with them, and many believed. To support and facilitate this work, the church at Jerusalem sent Barnabas to help with the spread of the word of God. Barnabas was a good man and was full of the Holy Ghost and faith. Barnabas left Antioch and went to Tarsus to find Paul. Upon finding him, he brought Paul back to Antioch, where they preached for a whole year. During this time they begin preaching also to the Grecians and many turned to the Lord. “And the disciples are called Christians first at Antioch”.

It has been some 8 to 12 years since the conversion of Paul.

## **DAILY SCRIPTURES AND THOUGHTS**

**MONDAY. ACTS 11:1-3. O THE POWER OF TRADITION.**

### **SCRIPTURE.**

V1. And the apostles, and brethren that were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the

word of God. 2. And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him. 3. Saying, thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them.

#### COMMENTS.

To be fair and understanding it is easy to see how Jewish converts to Christ would have a hard time breaking from their past and the centuries of deeply-ingrained Jewish traditions. Especially when you consider that their past was authorized by the commandments of Moses from the Lord. Beyond this sense of understanding of their difficulties, the express commission and teachings of Jesus, along with the prophecies of the Old Testament, were that the Gentiles would be welcomed into the kingdom of God. Their law had made provision for Gentiles to enter the Jewish community, with Ruth and Rahab being examples. The years of teaching on this fact should have made them receptive of the Gentiles being brought in to the things of God. But you cannot escape the fact that in the years preceding Christ's appearance, the Jewish culture had grown very legalistic, self centered, hypocritical and exclusive when they considered their divine favor and how they related to the rest of society. A religion without compassion, love, humility and a self-adorning attitude will very easily "strain out the gnat and swallow the camel".

God had to do a very powerful work on Peter or he never would have gone to the house of Cornelius. The Jews were not the only ones with an exclusive, self-centered attitude. It has always plagued the church and still does today. Yes, there really are hypocrites in the church and the examples are legion. God must work in every heart to remove it but we must ask him to. And this in no way suggests a compromise of a single truth, just a patient, understanding, and compassionate spirit. The church is the one place that should receive the wayward of any brand, while not lowering its standards to do so.

#### TUESDAY. ACTS 11:4-14. PETER TESTIFIES WHAT GOD DID FOR CORNELIUS.

#### SCRIPTURE.

V4. But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them, saying, 5. I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, a certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners: and it came even to me; 6. Upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw four footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. 7. And I heard a voice saying unto me, arise, Peter; slay and eat. 8. But I said, not so Lord; for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth. 9. But the voice answered me again from heaven, what God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. 10. And this was done three times; and all were drawn up again unto heaven. 11. And behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Caesarea unto me. 12. And the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting. Moreover

these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man's house. 13. And he shewed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter; 14. Who shall tell thee words whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved.

#### COMMENTS.

I think that it is noteworthy that we have two exact accounts of what transpired in Caesarea. (Acts 10 & 11). No doubt the account Peter gave back in Jerusalem was primarily to inform and convince the church that God had, indeed, wrought a mighty work of redemption among the Gentiles. Beyond that, having two accounts of the message of the gospel; the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, the baptism of the Holy Ghost and water baptism in the name of Jesus, along with their perfect harmony with that which occurred on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), should serve to prove beyond any question the plan of the gospel and salvation in every heart then and now. Unfortunately, due to the "traditions of the church age", this is not always the case.

Peter rehearsed with them the precise events of the vision he had and also that of Cornelius. The intricate details, the timeliness of each vision, and the coordination and orchestration of every point, could only have happened with God in charge. And that, no doubt, was part of Peter's manner of convincing those who contended with him about going in to the Gentiles: that only God could have ordered it. When he got to the house of Cornelius, Peter was informed that God had told Cornelius that Peter would tell him words whereby he might be saved. These people have heard from God; they have been waiting four days for Peter to get there and tell them exactly what God wants them to hear. The anticipation in that home was extreme. This was not some man-made meeting; God had arranged it in every detail. God took a very devout, godly man and a man who was an apostle of Christ and showed both of them that they each had needs, and then God used both of them to meet the needs of each other. How amazing is the work of God in the hearts of them who will obey him.

#### WEDNESDAY. ACTS 11:15-18. PETER'S TESTIMONY CONT'D.

V15. And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. 16. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost. 17. Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God? 18. When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.

"And as I began to speak" – "The Holy Ghost fell on them – as on us at the beginning". What a powerful, significant and revealing statement.

- a. "As I began to speak"; not at the end of the service with everyone in the altar praying.
- b. "The Holy Ghost fell on them"; by no action of their own, God came on them in such a powerful and overwhelming manner.
- c. "As on us at the beginning"; The same pattern, action and manifestation as at Pentecost.

Then I remembered that the Lord had told us that John baptized with water, but you will be "baptized" with the Holy Ghost. The record of this promise is found in all four gospels: Mt. 3:11; Mk. 1:8; Lk. 3:16; Jn. 1:33. This is a very significant connection that Peter makes regarding the Holy Ghost "as on us at the beginning". Thus it is not just some incidental occurrence, but a fulfillment with a pattern and trend wherever the gospel is extended. To further support this, Peter continues: "Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us who believed on the Lord Jesus, what was I that I could withstand God"? This testimony of Peter (and the other 6 with him) convinced the people that God had included Gentiles in his work of redemption.

**THURSDAY. ACTS 11:19-26. THEY WERE CALLED CHRISTIANS FIRST AT ANTIOCH.**

**SCRIPTURE.**

V19. Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but Jews only. 20. And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. 21. And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord. 22. Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas that he should go as far as Antioch. 23. Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. 24. For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord. 25. Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: 26. And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.

**COMMENTS.**

The story of the gospel reaching Gentiles picks up steam. First, of those who had been scattered from the area of Jerusalem, after the persecution arising from the stoning of Stephen, were men from Cypress and Cyrene, some two to three hundred miles from Jerusalem. They came to Antioch and at first preached Christ to the Grecians (Gentiles), and a great number believed. When tidings of this came to the church in Jerusalem they sent Barnabas to Antioch. Barnabas was a good man, full of faith and the Holy Ghost. (Barnabas, who always seems to be available for special needs, was from the isle of Cyprus). He exhorted them to continue in the Lord. Then he did a strange thing; he went to Tarsus and found Paul and brought him to Antioch. They preached at Antioch for a whole year, and "The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch".

**FRIDAY. ACTS 11:27-30. JEW AND GENTILE EMBRACE EACH OTHER.**

## SCRIPTURE.

V27. And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar. Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea. 30. Which also they did and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

## COMMENTS.

What a miracle within itself, that Jews and Gentiles are merged together in Christ as brothers and sisters in the Lord. Salvation does more than change your relationship with God; it also changes your relationship and attitude toward Christian brethren.

A casual reading of the last four verses of this chapter will give you only a superficial understanding of their content. Some prophet foretells a great dearth in all the world. The disciples at Antioch take up a "love offering" and send it by Barnabas and Saul to the poor in Jerusalem. However, if you dwell on them for awhile, further inspiration is found. First, the prophet Agabus, spoke by the Spirit of God that a famine was coming, which indeed, did come to pass. Since his warning was by the "Spirit", you have to realize that it was more than just information but something of real consequence to everyone.

The next thing you notice, when the dearth came to pass, is that it presented a condition of extreme hardship in the area of Jerusalem. We previously observed that Jerusalem was some long distance from Antioch, and thus they were not "next door neighbors". But the disciples at Antioch had been real beneficiaries of those who came from Jerusalem, bringing them the gospel. They owed them a real debt of gratitude for this. The disciples at Antioch, according to their individual ability, sent relief to the brethren in Judea. This reveals to you a precious component of the work of redemption in a person's life. It gives them a concern and care for those of like mutual faith, no matter if they had ever met them or not. Charity out of a pure heart is a major work of salvation. You can also see in this an open embrace between a once alienated Jew and Gentile world through the work of Christ in their hearts.

Finally this relief was sent by Barnabas and Saul to poor saints at Jerusalem. Maybe any messengers would do, but these two are fast becoming traveling companions and co-laborers in the gospel. They each have direct connections between both Antioch and Jerusalem. Looking ahead, you can see signs of an even greater work these two disciples will be called upon to do. They are developing relationships and confidence that will be very important when that work begins with the trials that will come with it. It is now approximately 12 years since the founding of the church and the door to the vast Gentile world is open wide.

## SUMMARY.

Peter defends his mission into Gentile fellowship on the grounds of what God did to bring it about and what he did at the house of Cornelius. Not only did he preach Christ to them, but God poured out the

Holy Ghost upon them. This was grounds for rejoicing by the disciples at Jerusalem. It was followed by the preaching of the gospel to more Gentiles in areas far from Jerusalem. The church there sends that good man, Barnabas, to Antioch to confirm their faith and to join Antioch and Jerusalem in Christian fellowship. Barnabas was very acquainted with Paul having known of his conversion in Damascus and having heard him preach in the name of Jesus and testified on his behalf before the church at Jerusalem. There must have been a close relationship between them for Barnabas goes from Antioch to Tarsus and brings Paul back with him. Together, they preach at Antioch for a year with many believing on the Lord. The chapter ends with them carrying a relief offering to those in need in Judea.

#### QUESTIONS.

1. What similarities can you see between the alienation between Jew and Gentile and conditions in our world today?
2. What attitude should we have under those conditions?
3. Why do you think disciples were called Christians first at Antioch?
4. Discuss the connections between Barnabas and Saul, and how it benefited the church and the gospel.