

### THE BOOK OF ACTS

#### Lesson 27, Chapters 11 and 12

Acts chapter 11 explains that after the incident with Cornelius and his household (when the Holy Spirit fell in a Pentecost-like event upon this group of gentiles), that Peter went back to Jerusalem where he faced a barrage of questioning and skepticism by the Believers. They were indignant that Peter, as their leader, would actually not only consort with a Roman army officer, but even have the bad judgment to go into the home of this gentile. The issue for them was that first of all, gentiles were the oppressors of the Jews. Second, everybody knew that gentiles were ritually unclean and thus by going into the home of this Roman Centurion, Peter (the leader of The Way) had knowingly defiled himself. But third, why would Peter think to want to deliver salvation and the fruit of the Holy Spirit to non-Jews? So far as they were concerned or knew, salvation was more than merely a uniquely Jewish concept; it was only available to Jews.

We've spent several weeks now discussing perhaps the most universal and central tenet of Jewish society: ritual purity. It crossed all the lines of Jewish factionalism. It didn't matter whether you were a Hellenist Jew or Hebrew Jew; a Believer or a Pharisee, Essene or Sadducee. It didn't matter whether you lived at the religious center of the world, Jerusalem, or in a small community far away in the Diaspora where Jews were a minority. Ritual purity was the goal, symbol and cause for how Jews lived, and gentiles represented the antithesis of it.

Peter's only possible defense was to relate to his fellow Believers the astounding events that led him to make this equally astounding decision. So the first half of Acts 11 is dedicated to essentially re-telling the story of Peter's vision of the sheet full of animals, and his relating of the strange instruction from God to kill and eat. And then of his realization that the vision was a parable and it had not to do with the ritual purity of food, but rather the ritual purity (or impurity) of gentiles. And that he was telling these gentiles the Gospel of Yeshua when his speech was interrupted by the coming of the Holy Spirit upon these same gentiles who even did exactly as all the Jewish Believers in Jerusalem had done on that first Shavuot after Yeshua's death and resurrection: they began praising God and speaking ecstatically in languages they didn't know! And thus what, exactly, was Peter supposed to think and do, especially when he remembered that their Master Yeshua had told them that while **Yochanon** (John the Baptizer) used to immerse people in water, that we will be immersed in the Holy Spirit?

At this point the Believers saw that Peter had indeed made his case; he had no choice in what he did because the Lord had instigated it. So, in the best spirit they could muster, they quit questioning Peter and his motives and instead began to praise God agreeing that while it might make no sense to them, the Lord has chosen to allow gentiles into the fold. However as I mentioned last week, that in no way meant to them that the issue of ritual purity between Jews and gentiles was now resolved. Thus we see in this chapter our author, Luke, informing us of a sub-group within The Way that on the one hand grudgingly accepted that gentiles could receive salvation, but on the other that merely meant to them that the next step was for these

new gentile Believers to be circumcised and thus officially become Jews. It seemed completely logical. After all, many gentiles had become God-fearers; that is, they gave up their Greek gods and started worshipping the God of Israel. However, they remained gentiles. Therefore obviously it was that Yehoveh had seen fit to take these God-fearers to another level by means of salvation and the Holy Spirit, and make them Jews! All that remained, then, was for the circumcision ceremony to formalize their conversion.

Let's re-read that last few verses of Acts 11.

### **RE-READ ACTS CHAPTER 11:19 – end**

For the moment, then, the believing Jews of Jerusalem have accepted Peter's explanation and although not entirely settled about the matter of gentiles becoming Believers, they have put it to bed for the time being. So Luke transitions to a different issue; that of those many Jewish Believers who had fled Jerusalem on account of the persecutions that arose against them after Stephen had been stoned to death. However as we look back in history, what is really happening is that we are learning how the Good News was spread to foreign lands. And, unfortunately, the God-pattern seems to be that the Gospel spreads best when the Believing community is undergoing tribulation. I see nothing in modern times that indicates that this pattern has changed.

Verse 19 says that these Jewish Believers from Jerusalem had traveled as far away as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch to escape persecution. Phoenicia was a sea-faring people whose main source of income was shipping. They were located on a thin strip of land to the north of the Holy Land. There had been for centuries generally good relations between Phoenicia and Israel.

Others went to Cyprus, an island in the Mediterranean. There were a number of Jewish colonies in Cyprus as it provided a key harbor in the shipping lanes. In fact the Barnabas whose name is mentioned often in the Book of Acts originally came from one the several Jewish colonies of Cyprus.

Antioch also goes by the name of Antioch on the Orontes. Antioch was named after the hated Syrian Governor Antiochus Epiphanies. It was another place where sizable colonies of Jews had settled for centuries. So the fleeing Believers of course went to places where they had relatives, or perhaps close friends, who would offer them shelter. In fact Antioch and Jerusalem were bound quite closely together and there was frequent travel between the two cities such that the Jewish residents of each city had an unusual comfort level with one another. It ought to be no surprise, then, that we are explicitly told that these Jewish Believers from Jerusalem took the Gospel message only to fellow Jews living in these foreign Jewish enclaves.

Verse 20 tells us that certain men from the Island of Cyprus and from the North African province of Cyrenaica (modern day Libya) also traveled to Antioch to teach about Yeshua. They were, of course, Jewish Believers but they weren't among those who had fled from Jerusalem. So there was a great deal of evangelism directed at Antioch, because there was a

great deal of Jews living there. But we're told, interestingly, that these Believing Jews also took the Good News to the Greeks; that is to gentiles. Had they heard about Peter's adventure with Cornelius already? Unlikely. They apparently figured out for themselves that if gentiles in substantial numbers were accepting the God of Israel that they just might also be open to accepting the Messiah of Israel. So while Paul is God's designated point man for taking the Gospel to the gentiles, by no means was he in charge of the "mission to the gentiles" nor was he the only Believer whom the Holy Spirit had moved to present gentiles with the Good News.

Let me also point out something that is good for Bible students to know about the choice of words used in verse 20. Here it says that the Believers from Cyprus and Cyrene spoke about Yeshua to the "Greeks". We've talked on numerous occasions about the Hellenists. Hellenists are first and foremost Greek speakers, but second they have to one level or another taken on Greek culture as their way of life. However in the New Testament, when we hear about Hellenists, it is only speaking about Hellenist Jews. Jews, who have taken on the Greek lifestyle, speak Greek as their first language, and in some cases they have accepted Yeshua. So the terms Hellenist Jews, Hellenist Believers, and Hellenists all mean the same thing: Greek speaking Jews, some of whom became followers of Yeshua. But when the intention is to refer to gentiles of the Roman Empire who speak Greek and live the regular Roman-Greek lifestyle, then the term that the New Testament uses is "Greeks" rather than "Hellenists".

The leadership of The Way in Jerusalem heard about a great number of Greeks accepting the Lord and they decided to send Barnabas (***Bar-Nabba***) to Antioch to investigate. The news would have caught them completely unaware. It is likely that most if not all of these gentile success stories were already God-fearers, so that made the task a bit easier since these God-fearers already had a basis for understanding what the Believers would tell them about Messiah Yeshua. And, equally likely, the gentile God-Fearers of Antioch were already being allowed some sort of limited access to the Synagogues, even though the ultra-pious Jews of Jerusalem would have been quite against such a thing. What we're seeing here in Antioch is a scale of evangelism to both gentiles and Jews that was without precedent.

Barnabas lent a needed credibility to the movement in Antioch as he was an official representative of the Apostles....the leadership. And true to his name, ***Bar-Nabba*** encouraged the new Believers to stay the course to give their entire selves to their newfound faith in Yeshua. Let's be clear: by God's grace Barnabas was the perfect man for the job. Being originally a Diaspora Jew from Cyprus, but now having lived in Jerusalem for some number of years, he could more easily relate to the Diaspora Jews of Antioch and he was not so allergic to gentiles as were his Jerusalem born and raised counterparts. Jerusalem Jews were the politically correct, ultra Orthodox Jews of that era, and so they had little tolerance for anything outside of whatever ***Halakhah*** they had grown up under. They were more rigid, whereas the Diaspora Jews were more flexible. And since The Way was still a movement in its infancy at this point; so the complicated matter of also beginning to include gentiles into what had always been thought was simply a recent and alternative sect within Judaism was going to require an open mindedness not typical of Jerusalem Jews.

I am so grateful for Luke's characterization of Barnabas as a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and trust. Because only with these attributes was he (and are we) able to recognize God's

grace in action such that it can shape our decisions and even change our minds over doctrines and traditions that we at one time held on to so dearly but now need to be rethought. Rabbi Shulam unearthed a most wonderful passage found in the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran, a place I've taken many of you to. This passage is taken from scroll 1QS. The "1" indicates in which of the several caves it was found, the Q indicates Qumran, and the S indicates the document type and name. In this case it is the document of Community Rules; a document that has given us much insight into the philosophy, behavior, and lifestyle of the Essenes, the writers of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Please listen carefully to these beautiful and inspiring words that I pray we would all regularly recall and keep near to our hearts.

***“As for me, to God belongs my judgment; in his hand is the perfection of my behavior with the uprightness of my heart; and with his just acts he cancels my iniquities.....if I stumble, the mercies of God shall be my salvation always; and if I fall in the sin of the flesh, in the justice of God, which endures eternally, shall my judgment be; if my distress commences, he will free my soul from the pit and make my steps ready on the path; he will draw me near in his mercies and by his kindness set in motion my judgment; he will judge me in the justice of his truth, and in his plentiful goodness always atone for my sins; in his justice he will cleanse me from all the uncleanness of the human being and from the sin of the sons of man, so that I can give God thanks for his justice and The Highest for his mercy”.***

There is no better description of the purpose and essence of Yeshua our Messiah and how we are to respond to Him than what we just heard. It is no wonder that as we examine some of Yeshua's New Testament statements and terms that we find them expressed at times similarly, and at other times nearly identically, in the Dead Sea Scrolls, such that the evidence mounts that Yeshua assuredly spent much time with the Essenes who saw each other as kindred spirits.

Verse 25 has ***Bar-Nabba***, for some unstated reason, heading off to Tarsus in search of Paul. Tarsus was around 100 miles north of Antioch so this was no small journey. For whatever reason he brought Paul back with him to Antioch. The passage says that Paul and Barnabas (not just Paul) met with the congregation (meaning the Believers) and taught a sizeable number of them and did so for about a year. Probably Barnabas understood that God had ordained Paul as His special emissary to the gentiles and so it seemed appropriate that Paul would be included in the evangelizing and maturing of the congregation in Antioch. But then in verse 26 we are told this:

**Acts 11:26 CJB *Also it was in Antioch that the talmidim for the first time were called "Messianic."***

Or, more familiar to our ears:

**Acts 11:26 RSV *.....and in Antioch the disciples were for the first time called Christians.***

This is a very famous statement that we'll take a few minutes to examine. It tells us that it was

in Antioch that The Way was first given a different label by the Greek speaking Diaspora Jews and gentiles than what they were known as in the Holy Land. And the CJB says that new name was Messianics; but virtually all other English translations will say Christians. This is a complicated but important matter and explanation is needed to put this in the proper context and to help reunite a centuries old divide.

The reason I want to address this is this: it is either said or implied in institutional Christianity that it was in Antioch where gentile Christianity was born. The idea being that it was in Antioch where Messianic Jews went one way, and gentile Christians went another way. While indeed that eventually did happen, it didn't happen during the New Testament era, and it certainly did not occur in Act 11:26 at Antioch. But the reason that it appears so is mostly one of language translation issues, but also of semantics. So please give me your best focus for a few minutes so I can explain this to you; it is important because what we see here in verse 26 has had an enormously negative impact on Jewish/Christian relations.

The question is this: does the word "Christians" actually appear here? And if the word is not Christians, what is it and why do all English Bibles insert the word Christians in verse 26? Let me begin by explaining that as more and more people are beginning to understand, our Messiah was not called Jesus at the time of His birth because Jesus is an English word, and English wasn't even invented until centuries and centuries later. Because He was Hebrew, he naturally was given a Hebrew name at birth and that name was Yeshua. However in Greek His name translates to **lesous**. That is, in Greek it is a 3 syllable word just as His Hebrew name Yeshua is a 3 syllable word. It is simply the normal way of language and language translation that a name in one language can sound quite different in another language. That English says Jesus (a 2 syllable word) is a great example of that.

Now; the words Messiah and Messianic are English sound-alike renditions of the Hebrew word **mashiach**, but they aren't actual translations because the actual English translation of **mashiach** is anointed one. The word Christian is really just an English sound-alike rendition of the Greek word **christianoï**, but not an actual translation of the word. Since the New Testament was written in Greek, then we must understand that **christianoï** is but the Greek translation variation of the Hebrew root word **mashiach**. This fact creates some serious theological, doctrinal and historical difficulties for us because to the ears of non-Jews it seems as though when we read Acts 11:26 a new religion (Christianity) was in process of being formed in Antioch and its members were called Christians because they were named after their Master, Christ, and they were separate from The Way that was being led by Jews. So it is then assumed or taught outright that beginning at Antioch gentile Christians separated themselves and began attending Churches while Messianic Jews attended Synagogues. And then when this happened, some Jewish Believers labeled as Judaizers tried to stop this separation of gentile Believers and instead draw them back to Judaism. None of this is accurate and much of it is due to translation errors and cultural misunderstandings.

Here is the reality. When a Greek speaking Jewish Believer talked to other Greek speakers (be they Jew or gentile) then of course he used his own Greek language; and so he used the Greek word **christos** when talking about Messiah Yeshua. Why did he say **christos**? Because **christos** was the Greek word for the Hebrew word **mashiach**. Thus **christos** does NOT

properly translate to the English word Christ (as it is normally taken today). In recognition of this fact, some newer English Bible versions (such as the ESV) are trying to rectify this by inserting the word “the” before the word Christ. That is, instead of saying Jesus Christ, the verse reads Jesus THE Christ. Why do that? Because **christos** is not a proper name, rather it translates literally into English as “anointed one”. Jesus Christ is not Jesus’ first and last name like Tom Bradford. Let me say this in another way to try and help. If I take the English word Christ and want to say it in Greek, there is technically no Greek word for it. If I want to translate the word Christ into Hebrew, there is technically no Hebrew word for it. But if I want to translate the English words “anointed one” into Greek, there is a Greek word for it: **christos**. And there is also a Hebrew word for it: **mashiach**. Thus: anointed one = mashiach = christos. Not Christ. All Greek Bible manuscripts use the word **christos** when speaking about Yeshua; not as his name, but rather as indicative of the position he holds. And His position is as the anointed one.

What has happened is that, unfortunately, when the Greek **christos** was given an English rendition as christ, rather than christ simply meaning “anointed one”, at some undefined point in the history of the gentile church the term christ turned from being an office that Yeshua held (the office of the anointed one), and it became a proper name. It is fascinating that even the secular Wikipedia fully acknowledges this. By way of example we’ve done the same thing with the word God. We’ve mistakenly made God to be God’s name. God’s name is not God. God is actually an office or a title; God’s name is Yehoveh or Yahweh depending on how you wish to pronounce it. Somehow along the way Christ became Jesus’s new, or alternate, name. It would be as though President Obama’s name suddenly just became President. And 100 years from now whenever anyone said “President” it was taken to mean only Mr. Obama’s personal name. Or it would be as though Pastor Billy Graham’s name suddenly became merely Pastor. So 100 years from now when anyone talked about being a fan of Pastor, who is being talked about is Billy Graham and no one would ask “which Pastor?” Once again: Christ is NOT Yeshua’s name. The word Christ has become a misnomer and this has led to all sorts of religious aberrations, including misunderstanding Acts 11:26.

As hard as this is to wrap our heads around, virtually everywhere in the New Testament that we find the word Christ (an English word), it is technically incorrect or at the least quite misleading. Rather it should say “anointed one”. So if we were to go through our Bibles and cross out the word Christ and replace it with “anointed one”, then we’d have the truer meaning. As I mentioned, some newer Bibles have added the word “the” before the word Christ to help the reader understand that christ is meant to be an office, not a name. Thus gentile Christianity has substituted a proper name (Christ), for an office (anointed one). And since anointed one is a purely Hebrew Biblical concept, by avoiding saying anointed one it has served to sever Yeshua away from his historical culture and identification and skew the New Testament to seem to be a document and a religion made for gentiles, while the Old Testament is a document and a religion made for Jews.

Further it has caused us to have to separate the use of, and give different definitions to, two terms that really mean the same thing (just using different languages). But in fact, these terms, Christian and Messianic, are perceived and used as very different from one another. Each group is a bit suspicious of the other, and not entirely sure that they believe in the same things.

In fact, because of the language issue, Messianic is a label that Jewish Believers in Yeshua tend to call themselves, and Christian is a label that gentile Believers in Yeshua tend to call themselves. To maintain the illusion of separation each group has given their religious leaders different titles (Rabbi versus Pastor), and call their Messiah different names (Yeshua versus Jesus). This needless division and misunderstanding all came about mostly due to language barriers and human agendas. But it has also created a disastrous wall of separation between Jews and Christians for centuries and it is going to take a lot of explanation (like what I'm giving to you now) to try to walk this back and create a different mental image when those terms are used.

So as it pertains to our lesson today the bottom line is this: at the time we are reading about in Acts when a Greek term was coined to indicate a follower of Yeshua, **christianoi**, that term was NOT Christians as we find it written in most Bibles (especially in the sense we think of it today). **Christianoi** was simply a Greek term that meant followers of the anointed one. This is a term that the Jews of that era would have had no issue with since they of course understood that Greek speakers wouldn't use Hebrew words to speak about Yeshua.....they'd use Greek words. And that this Greek term **christos** didn't effectively rename Yeshua to Christ. Remember the Greek name for Yeshua was **iesous**. This renaming and misuse of the Greek word **christos** occurred perhaps a century or more later, when gentiles finally wrested control of the Yeshua movement away from Jews, and an agenda arose of making belief in Yeshua a gentiles-only religion. Greek **christos** became Latin **christus**, and **christus** seems to have been mischaracterized as a proper name. And then from Latin to English the word became Christ and thus Christ-ians became a label for the gentile followers of this supposedly new religion that was created by a man name Christ.

Thus we have the reason that Jews scoff at the notion of becoming Christians. And it also mischaracterizes what is going on here in chapter 11 of Acts. Acts 11 is not the birth of Christianity; rather what we're seeing is that when enough gentiles AND Jews (all Greek speakers) in Antioch came to trust in Yeshua that they coined a label in their own Greek language for their group: **christianoi**. And the closest English words we could use, most literally, to accurately translate the Greek word and bring to us the intended sense of Acts 11:26 would be something like "anointed one-ites". So perhaps the prime reason for Jewish Believers and gentile Believers eventually separating into distinctly different religious organizations was essentially a mirage caused by language barriers.

Let's move on. Verse 27 might be more important to what comes next in Acts chapter 12 than meets the eye, because it tells of a prophet who prophesied that a famine was coming throughout the Roman Empire. It is possible (although not certain) that this famine explains some of the actions of Herod in chapter 12.

This prophet was named **Agav** that in Hebrew means grasshopper. The implication is that this prophet was a member of The Way. That is why when he brought his prophetic message of the coming famine to the disciples they believed him; and as a result the disciples determined to provide relief (provide charity) to their believing brethren in Judah. They would collect the donations and send them with Barnabas and Paul to the Holy Land for distribution.

We are told that this famine actually did come about during the time of Claudius, as predicted. Claudius was made Emperor of Rome in 41 A.D. at around the same time Herod Agrippa was made King of Judah. In fact these two were friends and companions early in life, when Agrippa as a young child was sent to Rome by his father to be educated in the ways of the Greeks. This further explains how Herod Agrippa was made a king and given Judah to reign over. We'll discuss this more thoroughly in our study of Acts 12. Let's go there now.

### READ ACTS CHAPTER 12 all

This chapter revolves around the activities of King Herod Agrippa. He was the grandson of Herod the Great who ruled in the years leading up to the birth of Yeshua. There was no king over Judah after the death of Herod the Great in 1 B.C. until King Herod Agrippa was coronated by Emperor Claudius in 41 A.D. So for 40 years after the death of Herod the Great, it was a series of Roman Procurators that ruled over Judah and the Holy Lands.

Agrippa was considered to be a Jew although genealogically he was just as his grandfather Herod the Great was; he was of Idumean and Nabatean roots. Idumea was formerly Edom, and the people there were descended from the line of Esau. Herod the Great's mother was Nabatean; they came from Ishmael. So while Herod the Great was a Semite, there was no Hebrew (and therefore no Jewish) blood in him. The same went for his grandson Herod Agrippa. However this fiction of his Jewishness was useful because the Jewish people convinced themselves that they now had a Jewish king.

Perhaps the main reason that the Jews were willing to be happily blind to the truth is because Agrippa followed Judaism. He was known to celebrate every Biblical Feast, and to sacrifice on the altar at all the appropriate times, and to respect the Priesthood and sanctity of the Temple. Agrippa was quite popular with the Jewish people and all in all thought to be a good and decent King. Josephus described him as a devout Jew, known for his generosity to his Jewish subjects. He resided in Jerusalem, at least part time, and his behavior was generally regarded as mild as opposed to rash.

So here's the conundrum: why did Agrippa go after the Jewish Believers so violently that he beheaded James (Jacob, **Ya'acov** actually) the brother of John? And more, why did the Jews, or better Judeans, express glee over him doing this? We're not told. However Bible commentators usually say that it was because of The Way's belief in Yeshua as Messiah that he did it and the Jews liked it. Yet there is no evidence that Agrippa was so religious that this was any issue at all, or that there was mass persecutions by mainstream Jews against the Believers.

All along it had been only certain religious zealots that wanted to decimate this new rival Jewish sect of Yeshua followers; not Jews in general. There is little doubt in my mind that King Herod Agrippa didn't go after all the Jewish Believers, but only targeted the leadership (thus we hear of James's execution and the arrest of Peter). Even more, I have little doubt that this consummate politician saw the leadership of The Way from political eyes, not religious. These leaders seemed to represent some kind of a threat to him.



The movement of Yeshua followers had grown large enough that it contained Jews of many ilks' including zealots; that is, very reactionary Jews who were militant and used every cause as a platform to fight against whatever they perceived as injustice. Peter was known as an outspoken leader of The Way, which made him a natural target. Kings didn't tolerate civil disturbances from their subjects. But the timing of this also suggests that the disturbances may well have been in reaction to the predicted famine, since indeed Claudius was now in power as the Roman Emperor and this is when the famine was to strike. This would also explain the issue of Tzor and Tzidon when something caused them to get on the wrong side of Agrippa. Historically they bought much of their food from the Holy Land and the issue of food was even more critical to them at this time of famine.

Notice in verse 3 that it says that it was during the season of unleavened bread (that is the Festival of Matza) that Agrippa arrested Peter. And then in verse 4 we're told that the King planned on dealing with Peter after Passover. This is a great place to make a point that I've made in our Festival lectures but haven't said too much about in our regular lessons.

By this time in history the terms Unleavened Bread and Passover had become interchangeable. A Jew could say that it was during the Passover season, or during the season of Unleavened Bread and it meant the same thing. The Jews were well aware that Passover and Unleavened Bread (***Pesach and Matza***) were two entirely different God-ordained Biblical Feasts. However, since Passover was a one day feast, and the week-long festival of Matza began the day after Passover, then in common everyday speech they were spoken of as one combined event. So some would call the entire festival period Passover, others would call it Unleavened Bread and even switch back and forth within the same conversation. And we find our New Testaments doing the same thing.

In Biblical reality, Jews were not required to come to the Temple for Passover. Rather it was the Feast of Matza at which a pilgrimage to the Temple was required. However, if one was going to be in Jerusalem for Matza, and since the first day of Matza was a Sabbath day that prohibited travel, then the only solution was to arrive early. Since the day before the 1<sup>st</sup> day of Matza was Passover, then any traveling had to be completed before the start of Passover. Thus if Jews were in Jerusalem for the Feast of Matza, they automatically would be there also for Passover. Agrippa didn't want to make a fuss and have an execution during these 8 days of holy festivities, so he arrested Peter prior to the start of Passover, and when both feasts were completed, he planned on dealing with him.

We'll continue with chapter 12 next time.