

Acts 11

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Acts 11:2 **they that were of the circumcision contended with him**

One of the institutions most resistant to change is tradition-particularly religious tradition. By accepting Gentiles, Peter was making a major change in the accepted doctrine. "Cornelius's baptism is the first clear case of a Gentile coming into the Church without having obeyed the requirements of the law of Moses-circumcision, the law of carnal commandments, ceremonial law, and so forth. Many Jewish brethren in the Church objected to this direct membership process and complained to Peter." (Robert J. Matthews, *Ensign*, Oct. 1995, 54) Continuing revelation was shocking to those steeped in Jewish tradition. Apparently, they had not yet fully appreciated Peter's position, his privilege to receive revelation, and the need for continuous revelation.

"Tradition in the first century, like that of any age, was stiff and extremely resistant to change. But the Lord had spoken, the light of a new day was bursting upon the early church, and changes were to be forthcoming ... Those who gave heed to the words of the living oracles and received their declarations as if from the mouth of the Lord himself became grounded and rooted in the faith; those who were more governed by their traditions and those of their forebears either lived and died weak in the faith or left the faith entirely." (Robert L. Millet, *Studies in Scripture, Vol. 6: Acts to Revelation*, p. 3-4)

Spencer J. Condie

"Sometimes members become so fond of certain traditions within the Church that a change in a given policy or procedure becomes a test of their faith. They believe in continuous revelation as long as it does not involve change. Describing the Saints in his day, the **Prophet Joseph Smith** once exclaimed, 'I have tried for a number of years to get the minds of the Saints prepared to receive the things of God; but we frequently see some of them ... will fly to pieces like glass as soon as anything comes that is contrary to their traditions' (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 331)" (*Ensign*, Aug. 2001, p.14)

Acts 11:15 the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning

Peter makes reference to the day of Pentecost when the long-promised Comforter was finally given to them in full measure (see Acts 2). The Gentiles had received a similar experience, even speaking in tongues (Acts 10:46). The significant difference was that Cornelius and company had not been baptized or confirmed when this happened (see commentary for Acts 10:45).

Acts 11:17 what was I, that I could withstand God?

Not uncommonly, prophets are placed in a difficult position-caught between the Lord's truth and popular opinion. Peter was in just such a quandary. He could not submit to popular opinion without offending the Lord. He must have felt as Joseph Smith, whose words are strikingly appropriate. We can imagine Peter asking, 'who am I that I can withstand God, or why [do my brethren] think to make me deny what I have actually seen? For I had seen a vision [concerning the Gentiles]; I knew it, and I knew that God knew it, and I could not deny it, neither dared I do it; at least I knew that by so doing I would offend God, and come under condemnation.' (JS-Hist 1:25)

Jeffrey R. Holland

"In the years ahead, Peter would preside over the Church of Jesus Christ with dignity and great power, not in spite of his need for divine assistance but clearly and admittedly because of it. Heavenly guidance and spiritual manifestation would be the marks of his administration. And there would never again be a denial of Jesus." (*However Long and Hard the Road*, p. 94.)

Acts 11:18 Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance

"The attitude of complete separation from the world was evident even among the disciples and apostles of Christ...After Peter's careful explanation, they concluded with wonder, 'Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.' (Acts 11:18.) In spite of repeated efforts by Paul and other leaders, the contention concerning the Gentiles continued and finally became a major contributor to the apostasy. That is clearly seen in the epistles of the early leaders.

"It does not require great insight to understand that a self-righteous attitude will also prevent a covenant son or daughter of Abraham from blessing the world with happiness, peace, and rest. Those of us in the Church today

must radiate to the world a spirit of love and acceptance in order to bring others to the truths of the gospel. We must love all people, even when their actions should be condemned. A spirit of pride, superiority, condemnation, or intolerance will prevent a righteous influence as effectively as worldliness will prevent it. Though members of the covenant cannot 'look upon sin save it were with abhorrence' (Alma 13:12), they must look on people as the children of deity and worthy of salvation and love." (S. Michael Wilcox, *A Witness of Jesus Christ: The 1989 Sperry Symposium on the Old Testament*, ed by Richard D. Draper, ed., 279.)

Acts 11:19-21 they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen

The tragedy of Stephen's martyrdom was not an isolated event, but part of a series of state-sponsored persecutions led in part by Saul. 'And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles...As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison. Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.' (Acts 8:1-4)

These were dark days for the Jewish saints. They had just lost one of their spiritual leaders and were being driven from their homes by their persecutors. But even persecutions work to the glory of God. It is doubtful that these persecuted saints realized how important their scattering was. Yet, the Lord knew that if they were driven from Jerusalem they would perform a great missionary work on their journey, 'And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord' (v. 21). Furthermore, they would become a stabilizing force amongst the burgeoning congregations in Gentile nations.

"The Prophet Joseph Smith explained that whenever the Lord sets up his kingdom on the earth, the devil sets up his kingdom at the very same time in opposition to it. (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 365) [But] the purposes of the Lord will be accomplished in the midst of war, turmoil, persecution, distress of nations, and the false philosophies of men...The Lord has promised that in the end, righteousness will triumph over wickedness, the Saints over their persecutors, and Christ over the devil. That is the message of all scripture..." (*Watch and Be Ready: Preparing for the Second Coming of the Lord*, 105)

Acts 11:22-24 they sent forth Barnabas...for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost

Barnabas is an under-appreciated hero of the early Christian church. An individual of incredible spiritual ability, he is referred to as an apostle (Acts 14:14) and was, for a time, senior companion to Paul. As a Levite-Jew born among the Gentiles of Cyprus, he was uniquely qualified to teach the Gentiles.

"Their choice of Barnabas to look into matters was a happy one, because he was not only a 'good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith' (Acts 11:24Acts 11:24), but also a broad-gauged judge of the characteristics of the Gentile element in the region, having originally come from Cyprus. His magnetic presence and personality would also give him prestige among the regular members and converts of the Church in Antioch. Barnabas quickly ascertained the true state of affairs and was glad of God's grace to the converts, whom he exhorted to cleave to the Lord with fixed resolve. (Acts 11:23Acts 11:23) Not only was Barnabas delighted with the converts, both Jews and Greeks, but he felt that he needed someone to help him carry on the good work in Antioch. He thought immediately of Saul, whom he had met in Jerusalem, and whose fame in the ministry round about Tarsus had reached to other regions. So he left for Tarsus, and having found Saul, 'brought him to Antioch.' (Acts 11:25Acts 11:26Acts 11:25-26)" (Sidney B. Sperry, *Paul's Life and Letters*, 31.)

Acts 11:26 the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch

"QUESTION: Why do some critics of the Church say that Mormons aren't Christians?

"ANSWER: Often those saying that Mormons are not Christians do so with the knowledge that the proper name of the Church is The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. They are equally aware that our faith centers in Christ, as do our doctrines. Most will concede that in practice we are a very Christlike people. Why, then, do they persist in labeling us as a non-Christian cult? The answer is in their history, not in our faith.

"...The Catholic and Protestant world declare themselves Christian on the basis of their loyalty to what are known as the Apostolic and Nicene Creeds. Thus the creeds become the issue. To fail to pay allegiance to the creeds is to be branded as non-Christian by those who do pay allegiance to

them." (Joseph Fielding McConkie, *Answers: Straightforward Answers to Tough Gospel Questions*, 32-3.)

Bruce R. McConkie

"Christians is an obvious name for the followers of Christ, for those who believe he is the Son of God and that salvation of all degrees comes because of him and his atoning sacrifice. Since there have been followers of Christ in successive gospel dispensations from Adam to the present, these all would have been known as Christians or some equivalent, synonymous term. By saying the saints were called Christians first in Antioch means that for the first time in the meridian dispensation there was a sufficient church membership so that nonmembers recognized the saints as a separate and distinct organization, one severed and apart from the Jewish synagogue and community.

"As far as the rejectors and detractors of Christ were concerned, the term Christian was probably first used in derision. Such was clearly the case among the Nephites. The Book of Mormon account, recording events in about the year 73 B. C.-well over a century before the Antioch congregation came into being-says: 'Christians . . . For thus were all the true believers of Christ, who belonged to the church of God, called by those who did not belong to the church.' (Alma 46:13-16.)

"A somewhat analogous situation exists in this dispensation with reference to the term Mormons...Are Mormons Christians? The answer depends on what is meant by Christians. If Christians are people with the defined view that salvation comes only through the complete gospel of Christ, Mormons are truly Christians in the precise and full meaning of the term.

"If Christians are people (and this is the standard definition of the clergy of the day) who believe in the holy trinity as defined and set forth in the Nicene, Athanasian, and Apostles creeds, meaning that God is a three-in-one nothingness, a spirit essence filling immensity, an incorporeal and uncreated being incapable of definition or mortal comprehension-then Mormons, by a clergy-chosen definition, are ruled out of the fold of Christ.

"But if by Christians is meant the saints of God in Antioch and elsewhere who believe and live as they did; if by Christians is meant those who accept Christ as the literal Son of God; who believe that miracles and signs follow true believers; who believe in kingdoms of glory, revelation, the gathering of Israel, and Melchizedek and Aaronic priesthoods; who believe there

must be apostles and prophets in the Church; and who believe in all respects as did holy men of old-then Mormons are Christians and they have the only pure and perfect Christianity now on earth. Indeed, Mormonism is pure, unadulterated Christianity, restored anew in all its grandeur and glory." (*Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 2:112-113)

Acts 11:27 in these days came prophets from Jerusalem...And there stood up one of them named Agabus

We hear about Agabus twice-once foretelling a great famine, which Josephus recorded, "did oppress them at that time, and many people died for want of ...food." (Josephus, *Antiquities*, Book XX, 2:5). Secondly, Agabus accurately foretells Paul's imprisonment in Jerusalem (Acts 21:10-14).

It may seem strange to some that this prophecy regarding a famine came from Agabus and not Peter. Such confusion stems from the common but false notion that all general prophecy must come from the President of the Church. That which comes *by way of commandment* for the entire church must, of necessity, come from "the Prophet," (DC 43:2-6), but general prophecy, *not given by way of commandment*, is a gift of the Spirit, not a product of priesthood. Therefore, the gift of prophecy may be sought after by any member of the church, male or female. Moses underscored this when he declared, 'would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit upon them!' (Numb 11:29). (See also Joel 2:28-29, Acts 21:9, Rev 19:10)

James E. Talmage

"The Gift of Prophecy distinguishes its possessor as a prophet-literally, one who speaks for another, specifically, one who speaks for God. It is distinguished by Paul as one of the most desirable of spiritual endowments, and its preeminence over the gift of tongues he discusses at length. To prophesy is to receive and declare the word of God, and the statement of His will to the people. The function of prediction, often regarded as the sole essential of prophecy, is but one among many characteristics of this divinely given power. The prophet may have as much concern with the past as with the present or the future; he may use his gift in teaching through the experience of preceding events as in foretelling occurrences...No special ordination in the Priesthood is essential to man's receiving the gift of prophecy...The ministrations of Miriam (Ex 14:20) and Deborah (Judg 4:4) show that this gift may be possessed by women also...In the current

dispensation this gift is enjoyed in a fulness equal to that of any preceding time." (*Articles of Faith*, 207-8.)