

Chapter Eleven

The first word of this new chapter is the familiar small but important *de* translated as “now.” *De* important because as set in a kind of story-like form with regard to what is to follow it introduces new phase in the *ekklesia*’s development. That makes for more attractive reading where the drama of the previous chapter spills over into the one at hand. Attention is now upon both the apostles and brethren (*adelphos* also as brother) located in Jerusalem who got the good news that the Gentiles had received the *logos* of God. *Ethnos* is the noun for those who are non-Jews and can be a somewhat derogatory term who in the case here turned out to be surprisingly receptive. Note how *logos* is used by itself; Peter isn’t associated as being responsible for it, he being simply the agent. News certainly traveled quickly, right on the heels of Peter having raised Tabitha from the dead. Again, Saul is not in the picture. He’s off in Tarsus also spreading the *logos* of God perhaps with greater vigor than Peter. Nevertheless, we can be certain he and the apostles were in touch with each other, most likely through the mediation of Barnabas.

After having had great success with Cornelius and his extended family...the two having become life-long friends even if they didn’t meet again...Peter decides to head off to Jerusalem to fill everyone in on his mission, the Joppa visit included. It must have been quite an emotional sendoff which Luke doesn’t record. He went undoubtedly with great expectation of being received as a hero but far from it. Actually it turned out to be a sobering experience. After all, Peter is still relatively new on the job. A group of people who subscribed to the Jewish ritual of circumcision confronted him rather forcefully. *Diakrino* or literally to judge through is the verb along with the strong preposition *pros* or sending this judging-through right into Peter.

This group...we don’t know how large or how much influence they wielded...were indignant not so much with having spent time with those who were uncircumcised, that is, the Gentiles at Caesarea, but had eaten with them. That was equivalent as treating them as equals. The adherence to ritual observance of Peter’s accusers outweighed the wonderful contacts just made and what that could forebode for the future of the *ekklesia*. You could say that on the surface these people did have a legitimate complaint but demonstrated that their view was clearly outdated, an “us against them” mentality. Also it reflected a view held by those who remained holed up in the confines of Jerusalem while so much activity was swirling about them.

In a way, Peter wasn’t surprised at this, having known virtually all those members of the Jerusalem *ekklesia* before he set out first to Lydda then to Joppa and finally to “pagan” Caesarea. Another factor that may have upset those subscribing to the

policy of not dealing with Gentiles is that Peter not only associated with them but with a high ranking Roman military official. That's as bad as it can get. A member of the *ekklesia*, even another apostle, may be excused but Peter? He was the leader and in danger of infecting everyone else with his behavior. It'd come as no surprise that some may have wanted to remove him from office.

Peter wasted no time in responding or as vs. 4 puts it, he "began and explained to them," *archomai* and *ektithemi* being the two verbs. The second literally means to place-from or out of (*ek-*) meaning he gave a detailed report. Both are with the adverb *kathexes*, something like being in sequence. He resisted starting off with an account of his visit with Cornelius and his household but knowing where those accusing him came from, wisely he decided to speak of something they could first understand. Almost certainly all the apostles were present. Also he doesn't mention Cornelius nor that he was a Roman centurion. Better to leave these details aside, most likely his reputation having reached those in Jerusalem perhaps through the centurion at Jesus' crucifixion. Accepting the favorable response by these Gentiles can come at a later time. And so Peter began with an account of his vision (*horma* as in 10.19) of the various types of animals let down from heaven in a giant sheet, momentarily omitting whether they were clean or not. Actually a good part of Chapter Eleven is a repeat of what had occurred in Chapter Ten.

In vs. 6 Peter says that he looks at this vision closely, the verb *katanoeo*, literally to put the mind down, a way of expressing close examination which here is done *atenizo* or literally without extension and with the preposition *eis*, "into which stretching." These two verbs are followed by *horao* or to observe. From this point on Peter restates his experience using essentially the same words. In vs. 12 men dispatched by Cornelius come to fetch him, this prompted by the Spirit which makes no distinction, *diakrino* and reads literally to judge through. Peter was unaware of this *diakrino* at the time but is something he soon came to accept.

As for this Spirit or *Pneuma*, in vs. 15 Peter says that it fell upon the members of Cornelius' household, *epiipto* as in 10.45 and mentioned again to convince those in Jerusalem that of the equality of Jews and Gentiles. This prompted Peter to recall the *rhema* or word of the Lord (not *logos*) or that which is said with regard to John. He baptized with water, but those present will be baptized with (*en*, literally "in" the *Pneuma* which is *Hagios* or holy).

After this Peter felt it was appropriate to interject a rhetorical question in vs. 17 intended to be a key point to persuade those present. God had given the same gift or *dorea* to these Gentiles as well as to "us," "us" being members of the *ekklesia*. It's contingent upon believing in (*epi*, literally 'upon') Jesus Christ whom Peter calls

Lord. Then he, leader of the *ekklesia*, adds a personal note. He marvels at the fact that he, a mere mortal, can withstand God, *koluo* also as to hinder or to prevent. In other words, his admission of having a closed mind did the trick. All present were reduced to silence, *hesuchazo* also as not to be disturbed. Next they gave glory to God, *doxazo* exclaiming to Peter's delight and relief that the leadership in Jerusalem recognized that God has given not just repentance or *metanoia* as putting-the-mind-after but "into life." Obviously the *ekklesia* had taken a huge step. Although those present must have continued worshiping in the temple, they now had a growing awareness that they are being weaned away from it. Just in time, too, for in the near future the temple will be no more. Also you could sense that very soon a new and permanent name would be given to these believers in Jesus Christ, one more appropriate than follows of the Way. It was felt to be as such from the beginning, and now the time was ripe.

Vs. 19 now shifts the working out of this first major stumbling block the *ekklesia* had to face. At least the mission was clear; actually it opened up the entire world. What follows reflects this, taking into consideration those who had been scattered as far away as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch. The verb is *diaspeiro* which reflects the seriousness at hand, to scatter through or *dia-*. Without mentioning names...but everyone knew who was responsible...this scattering-through was a result of the persecution that arose over Stephen. While true, more accurately it goes earlier than that or when Saul came on the scene rounding up members of the *ekklesia*. In the meanwhile he is silent, having been sent off to his hometown of Tarsus. Surely he was informed of all this and despite his conversion, remains responsible for having brought this about. In fact, never will memory of that leave him.

Although members of the *ekklesia* had been scattered far and wide, that didn't deter them in the least to speak the *logos* to Jews only, this having taken place before Peter's address. Here *logos* is in and by itself, presuming of course it is in reference to Jesus Christ. In addition to these were others from Cyprus and Cyrene who went to Antioch where they spoke to the Hellenists as the critical text puts it. In comparison with the *logos* to the just mentioned Jews, the latter favors speaking of the Lord Jesus, *euaggelizo* or the good news, this in a way requiring more effort because they had little or no exposure to Judaism from which belief in Jesus Christ is rooted. Vs. 21 speaks of the hand of the Lord being with those who had traveled to Antioch, a direct and active divine intervention being implied as to Gentiles. The result? A large number turned to the Lord, *epistrepho* or to turn upon (*epi-*) with another *epi*. In other words, we have here a double "upon."

Vs. 22 conveys that news of this missionary endeavor to Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch reached those in Jerusalem. After all, it still remained the center of Judaism

with the temple. Though Phoenicia and Antioch were within walking distance, Cyprus must have caused more a sensation by reason of being an island and thus further away. That means Greece could be next on the agenda. The way this is phrased is that *logos* came into the ears of the *ekklesia* in Jerusalem...not so much individuals as the apostles but the collective body of all present there. This prompted them to dispatch Barnabas to Antioch, and upon arrival, saw the grace of God, *charis* being a somewhat difficult word to translate and here not unlike the similarly difficult to translate Hebrew *chesed*, usually rendered as mercy. The practical manifestation of this *charis* isn't spelled out but was manifest by the way members of the *ekklesia* comported themselves causing Barnabas to rejoice, *charizomai* being the verbal root of *charis*.

The message of Barnabas is summed up in vs. 22 as a form of exhortation, the verb being *parakaleo* which as noted earlier means to summon beside, *para-*. Here it's with respect to remaining faithful to the Lord, *prosmeno*, literally to remain in the direction towards-which and thus implying constancy. Those in Antioch are to do this in a steadfast manner, *prosthesis* being a combination of the verbal root *histemi* or to stand, to remain prefaced with *pros-* signifying as it does with *prosmeno*, direction towards-which. Right after this vs. 24 which is an extended sentence of the previous verse adds simply and tellingly that Barnabas is a good man also full of the Holy Spirit and faith: *agathos*, *pleres* and *pistis*. Those in Jerusalem had recognized such qualities and thought crucial for someone being sent to Antioch, third largest city in the Roman Empire. Thus these two verses conclude with good news, that is, a large group of people were added to the Lord, another verb with *pros* prefaced to it, *prostithemi* with *ochlos* often as crowd described here as *hikanos* or large noted last in 9.43.

In vs. 25 we have Barnabas moving on to Tarsus with the intent of contacting Saul. The way it's put here and in the next verse is that he had to ask around, not knowing where he was staying. What prompted this? Barnabas recognized the importance of the *ekklesia* in Antioch and realized he couldn't handle it by himself. He recalled when Saul had preached fearlessly on behalf of Jesus Christ in Damascus and when he went to Jerusalem to meet the apostles. He was in effect the only one who saw the real potential of this former persecutor. If Saul could take on those in Damascus so readily, he'd be ideally suited for the task of evangelization in Antioch. If it weren't for Barnabas acting as such back in Chapter Nine and now, the church most likely wouldn't be the same as we know it now. One can just imagine how these two men met. Saul had an inkling someone would be coming to check up on him, he having been in apparent isolation for a while. Once the usual greetings were exchanged, Barnabas...like no other of the other apostles...had the ability to persuade Saul to join him in Antioch.

Once in Antioch, Barnabas and Saul remained there a full year, quite a long time compared with other missionary efforts to date. During that time they were taken in as guests, *sunago* as to go with. The **RSV** has “church” instead. In addition, they taught (*didasko*) quite a large amount of people. One can only speculate what this consisted of stretched out over a whole year since no scriptures were present as we know them today. Most importantly the members of the local *ekklesia* were called Christians for the first time. A footnote in the **NIV** says this term can be either a reproach or way to identify such persons. It occurs only two other times, 26.28 and 1Pt 4.16.

Chapter Eleven comes to a conclusion with what are called prophets coming from Jerusalem to Antioch. As for this term, 2.17 quotes at length from the prophet Joel right after the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, so perhaps it can be tied in with that gift mentioned early on. One current prophet in particular is singled out, Agabus. He foretold a great famine not just in Antioch but in the entire world or *oikoumene* more specifically as inhabited places. Luke throws in the name of the current Roman emperor, Claudius, which makes it more universal. This prompted the disciples not just to take care of people in Antioch but in Judea, Barnabas and Saul being chosen as agents to carry out any relief, *diakonia* also as service. Note the use of “hand” which makes their work all the more personal. Such distribution was carried out in accord with each person’s ability. The two verbs at hand are *euporeo*, to thrive financially and *horizo*, to set a boundary...in other words, within one’s means.

Chapter Twelve

“About that time” or *kairos*, a special occasion but in the context at hand, not so special in the sense of being one that’s unfavorable, preferably to be forgotten but nonetheless important. Chapter Twelve concluded with mention of a widespread famine causing the disciples to send relief. This vulnerable time or *kairos* offered King Herod ¹ a chance to go after the *ekklesia*, the verb being *epiballo* or to cast upon with regard to his hands. In other words, he lay a strong, vice-like grip on it. Vs. 1 adds the verb *kakoo* or to be evil, here rendered as “hands to evil” which puts this in a very sinister, stealthy way. Implied, of course, is that Herod had been watching the *ekklesia* grow and spread which if allowed to go unchecked, would be for him a real threat. Translation? He would then be subject to scrutiny from his Roman overlords who wouldn’t hesitate to dispose of him. With this in mind, Herod sent out spies to get information about the *ekklesia*. He took the usual approach of going after the

¹ A footnote in the **NIV** is helpful for information about King Herod and current events related to this part of Acts. While obviously valuable, the intent is to stick with the *lectio divina* approach to the text. The facts can be accessed accordingly.

elders who hopefully would cause members to disperse. Such is the reason for adding *kakoo*, to do this ruthlessly.

Herod did partly succeed by having killed James, the brother of John which pleased the Jews, the adjective *arestos* also as satisfying. Among them we can assume is the high priest Caiaphas who presumably is still active or if not, his supporters. Use of *arestos* gives the impression that Herod was acting not unlike a spoiled, frightened child. The best way to appease his elders was to concur with their darkest wishes. While that won him favor, he figured why not go after the leader, Peter? That would rocket him to the top. And so he arrested him, easy to find since he was in Jerusalem and very visible by way of his position. In fact, everyone knew where he and the *ekklesia* were located.

As for the arrest, it's during the feast of Unleavened Bread which follows Passover and lasts for seven days (cf. Ex 12.17). That was perfect timing. Jerusalem was overflowing with visitors from all over, so all the hub-bub would provide cover to make the arrest. Herod heard about the miraculous deeds associated with Peter and the *ekklesia*, especially how the apostles had been arrested earlier by the high priest yet escaped. For this reason King Herod decided upon the ridiculously large guard consisting of four squads of soldiers. Note the way he intends to deal with Peter: after the high holidays: bring him out to the people, *anago* as to lead up which here means from prison. Surely Herod recalled the fairly recent trial of Jesus and the involvement of Pontius Pilate. Although Pilate disappears from Acts, surely he was around and was informed of Herod's actions. We have no information on this, but he must have followed current developments closely, even ready to step in should Herod botch the job. Throughout his confinement the *ekklesia* earnestly besought God to protect Peter. The adverb is telling, *ektenos* or without extension as from the verbal root noted several times already, *ekteino*. This earnestness is further enhanced by the *pros-* of *proseuche* or prayer (of intercession) with the preposition *pros* itself as in reference to God.

To show the morbid fear Herod had towards the *ekklesia* and inhabitants of Jerusalem, in vs. 6 he decides to bring Peter from prison during the night. That's all Luke says, leaving his intent to the reader's imagination. As for Peter, the über-strick guard already mentioned gets more so which reflects Herod's near insanity. One wonders how Peter could move a muscle sleeping between two soldiers, bound with chains including sentries. All these men must have thought Herod had lost it but wouldn't dare mention it aloud. Even thinking of it was dangerous. All this is to prepare the reader for his dramatic release, a way to get back at Herod.

Vs. 7 continues as part of the previous verse where an angel of the Lord appeared, *ephistemi* literally as to stand upon followed by a light shining in the prison cell. Was it the same angel that released all the apostles as in 5.19? Chances are it was, so when Peter met this angel the two must have exchanged words of greetings including some humorous remarks as “Here we go again!” Another touch of humor is that despite this dramatic appearance, the angel struck Peter to wake him up. One wonders how anyone could be sleeping in such a situation. Anyway, the angel told Peter to leave as quickly as possible after telling him to dress. He added these words to reassure Peter that what was happening is not a dream, that it’s real or as vs. 9 puts it, *alethes* or true. This is followed by further touching words, that Peter is to put on his mantle and follow behind the angel. Nothing is said of the two soldier on either side of him, though the text mentions that the chains which bound him fell off. That means each soldier remained there with the chains fastened to them.

The drama of all this continues with the angel leading Peter from the prison as if the two were taking a casual stroll. Once the angel deposited him outside, he in typical fashion of an angel left. Since this was their second encounter, it’d come as no surprise that they said somewhat jokingly, “See you next time.” Apparently all those involved in securing Peter remained fast asleep or in a trance. So after he came to himself (literally ‘having become in himself’) he exclaimed what he knew to be the truth, that an angel sent by God was responsible for freeing him. Obviously there will be terrible consequences from King Herod, but at the moment Peter was too overjoyed to think of this.

Since it was the middle of night, Peter had to go somewhere. It was natural for him to head for the house of John’s mother because he knew beforehand that members of the *ekklesia* would gather there praying on his behalf. The two verbs are *sunathroizo* and *proseuchomai* where the *sun-* or with prefaced to the first verb suggests a more urgent gathering which indeed was the case. Thus these people were praying ever since Peter got arrested and haven’t stopped nor entertained any intention of stopping.

What follows definitely is an eyewitness account because of the humor involved. Upon arriving at Mary’s house, Peter knocks at the outer gate even though by now it must be the early hours of the morning. He had his ears attentive to every sound, wondering what he heard might be coming from Herod’s soldiers on the prowl. When he approached the house, he knew people were awake, for it was the only one which was illumined on the otherwise totally dark street. Rhoda the maid was on duty, the term being *paidiske* more as a slave, and heard the knocking. Even though she recognized Peter by his voice, wisely she didn’t open. Everyone knew he was

being held in prison by King Herod. Rhoda did the right thing because it might be a ruse by the local authorities to arrest members of the *ekklesia*.

After having run off to those praying and telling them that most likely it was Peter at the door, they claimed she was mad, *mainomai* also to be in a rage. At first it comes across as a harsh response but after all, Rhoda is a slave and can expect such treatment. Nevertheless, she insisted it was Peter, *diischurizomai* fundamentally to rely upon but commonly used as in the case at hand. Some offered the possibility that it was the angel (again, *aggelos* as messenger) of Peter, akin to a guardian spirit. However, that was a fairly lame excuse, and everyone continued to deny Rhoda's words. However, Peter persisted in his knocking as he heard the growing commotion within. Finally they had the courage to open the door and were dumbfounded or *existemi* as to stand outside themselves. Indeed this was an accurate response, for all knew how Peter had been arrested and placed under such a strict guard.

When everyone finally came to their senses, in vs. 17 Peter motioned with his hand for all to quiet down, *kataseio* also to make rapid motions. He then recounted what seemed impossible, how the Lord had delivered him from prison. Note that he mentions the Lord or Jesus Christ who was responsible for it, not the angel. Peter wanted to make sure that although an angel was directly involved, the Lord and thus Jesus Christ always has primacy. After asking those present to inform James and those described as brethren (*adelphos*, brother) or leaders of the local *ekklesia*, Peter simply left. He did so with the same swiftness as the angel which had delivered him from prison leaving everyone pretty much aghast. However, on further reflection, it was best for him to vanish. Any moment now Herod would pull out all the stops in his efforts to track him down.

Vs. 18 describes the situation accurately when it came time to describe King Herod's reaction upon discovering what had happened. The opening words are "no small stir," the noun being *tarachos* also as commotion, disturbance as pertaining to the soldiers from whom Peter made his escape. At once Herod asked the soldiers what had happened. Though there's no record of this, obviously they hadn't the slightest idea. They knew then and there that Herod would execute them which he did immediately. Still that did not solve the problem. His task now was to track Peter down and get the full story. However, Herod decided to head for Caesarea which was an important seat of government for the region. He did hear of Peter's relationship with Cornelius and figured that the centurion was involved. Herod had to be very careful, for if he misjudged the situation, he'd feel the full weight of Roman authority bearing upon him.

In vs. 20 action shifts to the inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon, two regions dependent upon King Herod for food. For some reason or other which remains undisclosed but most likely sparked by the incident with Peter, Herod directed his anger toward the inhabitants of these areas. The verb is *thumomacheo* which couldn't fit the bill any better. It consists of the noun *thumos*, intense expression or desire prefaced to the verb *machomai*, to fight. Herod would deal harshly with the inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon, a way of getting back of members of the *ekklesia* despite the two having no connection with each other. All in all the *ekklesia* turned out to be too slippery for him.

When Herod met with representatives of Tyre and Sidon he decked himself out with all his royal finery to make the most formidable impression imaginable. Apparently it worked, for the locals considered Herod to have the voice of a god when he spoke. This is somewhat ambiguous because the locals knew of Herod's hostility yet were hoping his opening words wouldn't reflect it. At this point an angel of the Lord steps in and strikes King Herod dead on the spot. Chances are it's the same angel who had so recently delivered Peter from prison. If allowed to continue, Herod would reek incalculable damage upon the *ekklesia*. In addition to giving the reason for slaying Herod, the text says that he failed to glorify (*doxa*) God. Vs. 23 adds a special insult, that is, he was eaten by worms (first) and died.

With King Herod out of the way, vs. 24 moves to a conclusion of the chapter at hand by saying that the *logos* of God...and *logos* can be taken in two ways, Jesus himself as *Logos* and the preaching involved...both grew and multiplied. In other words, two similar verbs are used with different nuances, *auxano* and *plethuno*, to grow as a plant and to increase in number. Thus the *ekklesia* is marked by expansion both within and without. Now with Herod out of the way, Barnabas and Saul returned along with John literally into Jerusalem. The stage at last is set for Saul to effectively take over the rest of the Acts of the Apostles.