

## Determination

(Acts Session 19—August 2, 2026)

As **Acts 11** opens, the Apostle Peter is called on the carpet for what had just transpired in **chapter 10**. And so he spends the first half of the chapter explaining what happened. And since that section is more or less review, I'll have us jump down to **vs 19** where we will begin focusing on *the final 12 verses* of the chapter.

But let's look first at **vs. 18**, where they react to Peter's summary of his ministry to the Gentiles down in Cornelius' house:

### **Acts 11:18**

When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, "Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.

And then suddenly Luke, the author of the book of Acts, directs our attention about 300 miles north of Jerusalem to a city called Antioch.

### **Acts 11:19-20**

**19** Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only. **20** But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus.

Antioch's location made it a crossroads for traders and merchants coming from all across over the Mediterranean, from Asia Minor and from Egypt. It would become the primary strategic hub for evangelizing the Gentile world, providing the base for the Apostle Paul's missionary work.

We need to look closely at these two verses, since Luke has framed them as a comparison. In

**verse 19**, we are told that when certain Christians left Jerusalem during the persecution and went north, they ended up...*preaching the word to no one but the Jews only*.

But in the very next verse, Luke tells us that some of these men started preaching to Gentiles, along with preaching to the Jews.

He refers to these folks in Antioch as Hellenists. Now some would say that these Hellenists were in fact Jews themselves, of the same variety that were mentioned in Acts chapter 6.

In other words, the thought would be that Luke calling them Hellenists indicates that either they were Jews who lived in Gentile lands, or they were Gentiles from those same lands who had converted to Judaism.

And if they are right in saying this, then these Hellenists are simply Greek-speaking Jews or Greek converts to Judaism. And that means that **verse 20** is not a major development in church history.

On the other hand, if these folks getting preached to in Antioch are not Jews at all, but in fact are card-carrying Gentile heathens, then what happened in **verse 20** has monumental implications.

For my money, these folks were Gentile heathens. And here is what makes this quite extraordinary: It means that these Christians had taken it upon themselves to start preaching Jesus to Gentiles.

There is no record of them receiving a vision like Peter did.

We're not told there was any kind of an encounter with an angel, telling them to preach to the Gentiles.

There was no communication from headquarters back in Jerusalem, directing them to reach out to the Gentiles with the gospel.

What is quite clear, however, is that God was definitely in favor of what they were doing.

**Acts 11:21**

And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord. So here's my question. What if it happened this way: What if they were just thinking, "**Why not? Why not tell them about Jesus and see what happens?**"

Based on the information we have before us in **chapter 11**, that appears to be the most likely assumption.

And it was probably easier for them to embrace that line of reasoning, since these Christians were not from Israel themselves. They would have naturally been a little more comfortable around Gentiles than their Israeli counterparts. The separation between Jews and Gentiles might not have been as pronounced as it was back in Israel.

**Acts 11:20a**

**But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene...**

One thing's for sure: This was not a small step they were taking. Up until this point, the proclamation of the Christian message had been directed exclusively at the Jews. Because everybody figured that you couldn't follow Jesus if you weren't a Jew, or a convert to Judaism.

And so by daring to evangelize Gentiles directly, they were stepping across a line that the church in Jerusalem would have strongly resisted.

And here's what I find most interesting: the way Luke lays it out, these men from Cyprus and

Cyrene took this radical step long before Peter had that vision in chapter 10.

**Acts 11:19a**

***Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch...***

Their migration to Antioch took place on the heels of the persecution in Jerusalem. And that persecution happened 4 or 5 years before Peter preached his sermon to the Gentiles at Cornelius' place.

So it makes me wonder: is there a place for trial and error in terms of Christian ministry? Even if it means going against the existing religious norms?

Are we missing something if we never stretch beyond the perceived boundaries of religious tradition?

There will be times in the life of a Christian when you have a strong assurance that the Lord wants you to do a certain thing. You are being led by the Spirit, and because you have that assurance, you move forward with fair amount of confidence. And then God blesses your efforts and it's wonderful and amazing, but not necessarily that surprising.

But there are these other times when you feel like you're just trying to do the right thing. But you're not quite sure exactly what the right thing is. But you go ahead and give it your best shot anyway, and what do you know? God shows up and amazing things happen.

Perhaps we need to leave room in our thinking for God to show up and do a work. Instead of just doing the same thing over and over again. Take a chance. Try something different.

Do you remember Jonathan, the son of King Saul in the Old Testament? There was this one time when Jonathan is trying to figure out what to do next.

#### I Samuel 14: 1, 6

1 Now it happened one day that Jonathan the son of Saul said to the young man who bore his armor, “Come, let us go over to the Philistines’ garrison that *is* on the other side...

6 Then Jonathan said to the young man who bore his armor, “Come, let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised; *it may be* that the Lord will work for us. For nothing restrains the Lord from saving by many or by few.”

*“It may be”*. That was Jonathan’s frame of mind. You might just as easily substitute the phrase *“Why not”*, or *“What if”*. Or perhaps this one—*“You never know”*. I think God likes it when we start thinking like that. Thinking about doing something for God. That is a sanctified imagination.

And then Jonathan takes the next step. He went from thinking to talking. He started talking to his armor bearer about doing something for God.

And that’s a really important step to take. In fact, there is an amazing promise in the last book of the Old Testament—Malachi. From the King James Version

#### Malachi 3:16 KJV

Then they that feared the Lord spoke often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels...

Well, it didn’t take long for Jonathan to go from talking to doing something with what he had

been talking about. He remained cautious, but he went forward with his eye towards any movement on God’s part.

#### I Samuel 14:6-13

6 Then Jonathan said to the young man who bore his armor, “Come, let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised; it may be that the Lord will work for us. For nothing restrains the Lord from saving by many or by few.”

7 So his armorbearer said to him, “Do all that is in your heart. Go then; here I am with you, according to your heart.”

8 Then Jonathan said, “Very well, let us cross over to *these* men, and we will show ourselves to them.

9 If they say thus to us, ‘Wait until we come to you,’ then we will stand still in our place and not go up to them.

10 But if they say thus, ‘Come up to us,’ then we will go up. For the Lord has delivered them into our hand, and this *will be* a sign to us.”

11 So both of them showed themselves to the garrison of the Philistines. And the Philistines said, “Look, the Hebrews are coming out of the holes where they have hidden.”

12 Then the men of the garrison called to Jonathan and his armorbearer, and said, “Come up to us, and we will show you something.” Jonathan said to his armorbearer, “Come up after me, for the Lord has delivered them into the hand of Israel.”

13 And Jonathan climbed up on his hands and knees with his armorbearer after him; and they fell before Jonathan. And as he came after him, his armorbearer killed them.

14 That first slaughter which Jonathan and his armorbearer made was about twenty men within about half an acre of land.

All of a sudden Jonathan finds himself in the middle of a miracle. It wasn’t as big as David slaying Goliath. Or Samson killing 1,000 Philistines with the jawbone of a donkey.

But it was pretty impressive. They were faced with 10 to 1 odds, and came out on top.

And now back in **Acts 11**, I can't help but wonder that maybe these disciples from Cyprus and Cyrene said something similar.

Try to imagine what was going through their minds, as they looked around and saw the spiritual emptiness in the Gentile world. They could sense the great need they had for the Lord in their life.

And who knows? Maybe like Jonathan, they said,

“...it may be that the Lord will work for us...”

Only this time, instead of killing a bunch of Philistines, these brothers got to watch a bunch of people get born again because of their message.

What do you think? How about if we let these brave disciples be our role-models? What do you say we let Jonathan's thoughts spur us into action. To take a chance for Jesus. And our motto could be...

***“Why not?”***

Mark Batterson wrote a book with a one word title—“**IF**”. And his basic premise was this—to change your thinking from looking backwards and saying, “**if only**” into looking forward and saying, “**what if**”.

Thinking like that will give legs to your dreams. It will give you some determination in the expression of your faith. And determination is something we could all use more of.

Now very quickly we need to turn our attention back to Jerusalem.

**Acts 11:22-24**

**22** Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch.

**23** When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord.

**24** For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord.

First of all, we have to remember that the church in Jerusalem was the nerve-center for all things concerning Christians at this time. And they were being watchful over any new developments, as good stewards should be.

Well, the Lord had used Peter to open them up to the concept of Gentiles becoming Christians directly, without becoming Jews first.

And so upon hearing this amazing report regarding what was happening in Antioch, they send Barnabas up there to gather information.

Barnabas was a trustworthy man, and well equipped to be sent out on a mission like this.

And when Barnabas arrived, he saw the grace of God. How can a person see the grace of God?

Luke is speaking of an outward manifestation of grace here. And this aspect of God's grace is not just about forgiveness. It is also about the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives, which enables new converts to turn their lives around and live for Jesus.

Barnabas saw evidence of God's grace popping up all over the place there in Antioch.

And so he gives them this advice:

Acts 11:23

When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord.

Many versions—including the one I generally prefer —NKJV—they all use the word **encouragement** in this verse.

Actually, a better translation of this word might be “**exhortation**”—and it is a much stronger expression.

Exhortation calls you up higher, and urges you to go further in. The Greek word is “**parakaleo**”. Very similar to what word? Anyone?

**Paraclete**. Which is the title given to the Holy Spirit by Jesus. The Holy Spirit is our **Paraclete**. Another Helper. Meaning a Helper like Jesus was to the disciples.

And that is why I think translating that word as “**encouragement**” misses the point.

You see, exhortation has a force and a power that rises above mere encouragement. It is electric. Commanding. It can be both comforting and unnerving at the same time.

Because exhortation carries with it the authority of Heaven. As well as all the hopes of heaven.

A person who is exhorting other Christians gets them refocused on the things that matter most. Eternal things.

I like to be encouraged. But I’ll take exhortation any day over encouragement.

Well what was this word of exhortation that Barnabas had? Let me read you this verse from the King James version—

Acts 11:23 KJV

*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.”*

**Purpose of heart**. That is so important. These guys had repented. They had believed. And Barnabas knew that because of what he had seen. He had seen the grace of God in their midst. Evidence of genuine conversion.

Now one little side note here, just in passing. It says that *Barnabas was glad when he saw the grace of God*. And so here’s something for you to chew on this week:

**Would you like your sense of gladness or joy to increase?** Luke just told us how. Be on the lookout for the grace of God showing up in the world around you. In the lives of those you know and love, or people you just happen to meet.

God is at work all around you. Keep your heart pure, and you will get an eyeful of His grace at work. “**Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.**”

Alright, back to Barnabas’ exhortation: Purpose of Heart.

The word translated “**purpose**” comes from a Greek word that means **something that is thought out ahead of time. Pre-meditated. Not accidental, but purposeful. Intentional.**

You don’t just stumble into spiritual growth. It has to be intentional. And the goal of having **purpose of heart** is to, “...continue with the Lord.”

You might say that this is a recipe for success in the Christian life. Or at the least, this is an ingredient in the recipe.

Purpose of heart. Determination.

Here's the bottom line, alright? We need a word from the Lord. We need a word from one another.

Have you been exhorted lately? And along those same lines, have you exhorted anyone yourself?

Be on the lookout for the grace of God. It will be the great source of joy in your life.

It's so easy for us to develop tunnel vision, focusing exclusively on our own struggles and such. It takes some determination to look for God's grace in action around us. But having that kind of mindset is what it takes to be more helpful to others.

Which is why I want you to seriously consider the possibility of being an exhorter like Barnabas. It is such a needed ministry. Something in which we can all participate. For the book of Hebrews tells us so.

***Exhort one another daily.***

You want to know a secret? Sometimes, all it takes for someone to continue on with the Lord and not give up, is a word of exhortation. That's it. A life-saving word of exhortation, coming at just the right time. And it could come from you.

Purpose of heart. Determination. It is a wonderful quality. An indispensable quality. But listen to me closely, please: Purpose of heart is generally **not** acquired in isolation.

Just like with Jonathan, you need to talk with others about your aspirations for the Lord. That plays a major part in being determined for Jesus.

And as we look into these things, I can't help but wonder. Maybe someone here has felt defeated lately. Of deflated. Unmotivated

almost to the point of hopelessness. You know, thinking, "***Oh, what's the use in even trying?***"

If by chance you find yourself entertaining such thoughts this morning, let me offer you a word of exhortation.

God is not done with you yet. **He** is the deciding factor in all things that concern you.

We all struggle. All of us. We stumble. We lose our way at times. But our past regrets need not define our future. Your best days lie directly ahead of you, because of Jesus.

He gets over your past. You need to get over it too.

Regardless of your circumstances...

You need to let yourself dream—***again.***

You need to have a sanctified imagination—***again.***

You need to seek His perfect will for your life—***again.***

It's time to exchange all of those "***if only's***" for "***what ifs***".

This is no time to give up on yourself. Open your eyes to the grace of God that is at work all around you. He will restore your joy. He can and He will resurrect your determination.

A spiritually abundant life is in your future, and it's not way off in the distance, either. Count on it.

You see, Jesus is very good at what He does. And He will see that you have the purpose of heart—the **determination**—to finish the race and finish it well. Just don't give up, and lean hard into His grace.

I get it. Your challenges are not small. And your feelings may well be right—no one else really understands. No one else really knows how tough it is.

Except, of course, for Jesus. He knows, and He cares. And He has sent the Holy Spirit—***the Paraclete***—to be your ever-present helper. The Spirit is the One who will make you strong.

So this week, please—at all costs—believe that you can recover your determination to move forward with the Lord.

You can start by keeping your eyes open for His grace at work all around you. That will help to make your heart glad again.

And that gladness—otherwise known as the joy of the Lord—it is your strength. And with renewed strength, you will quite naturally become one of the exhorters. And trust me—exhorters are something that the family of God is in desperate need of.

Pursue all of this with determination in the coming 7 days. ***Cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart.***