

Acts Chapter 11 Continued

Acts 11:19 "Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only."

See notes on 8:1-3.

“Phoenicia”:

The coastal region directly north of Judea, containing the trading ports of Tyre and Sidon.

“Cyprus”:

See note on 4:6.

“Antioch”:

Located some 200 miles north of Sidon.

Antioch was a major pagan metropolis, the third largest in the Roman Empire, behind Rome and Alexandria.

Antioch of Syria was situated on the Orontes River about 15 miles from the Mediterranean and was located along important land routes between Asia Minor, Syria, and Palestine.

It was about three hundred miles north of Jerusalem.

Antioch was founded during the time of the Greek Empire (300 B.C.), and served as the capital of Syria during the Seleucid and Roman times.

At its height, it probably had a population exceeding half a million and was the third largest city of the Roman Empire, surpassed only by Rome and Alexandria.

Since many Jews lived in Antioch, Josephus’ statement that the Seleucids encouraged Jews to immigrate to Antioch, giving them the rights of full citizens may be true.

The events of this verse expand on what was stated (in 8:4).

Due to Saul’s persecution, the believers went everywhere preaching including “Phoenicia, Cyprus,” and “Antioch.”

This early preaching predates Cornelius’s conversion and so was to “the Jews only.”

As with any history one must not suppose that all events are in a strictly chronological order.

The events, for example, of Paul's ministry at Jerusalem and Tarsus in chapter 9 are several years later than this.

Antioch of Syria is mentioned in the New Testament only in Acts and in Galatians (2:11).

Here the followers of Christ were first called "Christians" (11:26).

Antioch became the center of Paul's labors in that Paul began each of his three missionary journeys there.

The modern Turkish city of Antakya (population 60,000), occupies the ancient site.

It appears that this area they were scattered to, were mostly Gentile people, but these apostles preached to the Jews in this area only.

When Stephen was stoned to death, the apostles and other disciples scattered and went to these various areas.

Verses 20-22

Several years, possibly as many as 10, after the gospel was first preached in Antioch, men from "Cyprus and Cyrene" come preaching to non-Jews.

When the Jerusalem church heard of this, they sent another Cypriot, Barnabas, to minister there.

Acts 11:20 "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."

"Men of Cyprus and Cyrene":

See notes on 6:9; 13:4.

"Grecians":

See 6:1; 9:29.

Greek-speaking non-Jews (see note on 6:1).

Cyprus is a large island in the Mediterranean off the coast of Syria.

You can see that fear had driven these disciples to a faraway place.

This Cyprus was the native home of Barnabas.

This area was Paul's first missionary field.

Antioch was the place Jesus' followers were first called Christians.

This area, I guess you could say, was the cradle of the first Christian missionary ministry.

Acts 11:21 "And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord."

“Hand of the Lord”:

This refers to God’s power expressed in judgment (Exodus 9:33; Deut. 2:15; Jos. 4:24; 1 Sam. 5-6; 7:13), and in blessing (Ezra 7:9; 8:18; Nehemiah 2:8, 18).

Here, it refers to blessing.

All of the eloquent preaching in the world will not bring one sinner to salvation, if God is not the author of the sermon.

What makes a sermon cause people to be saved is the power of the Holy Spirit in the message.

The Holy Spirit then woos the person and prepares his heart to receive the message before it even begins.

1 Corinthians 1:21 "For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."

You see, what is foolish to man is wise to God.

Acts 11:22 "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."

“Barnabas”:

He was one of the leaders in the early Jerusalem church and then later he became a missionary to the Gentiles.

His name was Joses, but the apostles called him Barnabas, which is an Aramaic name meaning “Son of Encouragement.”

He was a Levite from the island of Cyprus, but is first seen in Jerusalem (see note on 4:6).

Since he was a Cypriot Jew, he came from a similar background to that of the founders of the Antioch church.

He was generous with his possessions (4:37), showed a kind spirit toward others (9:27), and was godly in his character (11:24).

When the Jews in the Jerusalem church heard of the Gentile conversions at Antioch, they chose Barnabas to go to them.

For a year he stayed and accomplished a great work among them.

Then, when God called Paul to begin his missionary work, He also called Barnabas (13:2).

They severed their relationship before Paul's second missionary journey over the issue of John Mark's reliability since Mark had abandoned them on their first journey (15:36-41).

Barnabas does not appear again in the narrative of Acts.

He is identified by Tertullian as the author of Hebrews.

Clement of Alexandria reports that Barnabas was one of the Seventy (Luke 10:1), and was the author of a so-called Epistle of Barnabas.

But all of these reports are probably incorrect (Acts 4:36; Acts 13).

The good news of how people were readily accepting the Lord spread fast and was soon all the way back to Jerusalem.

Barnabas, as we had said before, was from this area and he would know the people.

He was sent, because he knew all the ins and outs of this area and the people.

Acts 11:23 "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."

Barnabas was glad that the people of his home area had received the Lord.

It appears that he preached (exhorted).

He warns them to walk in their salvation and not fall back into the ways of the world.

This leaves no doubt that Barnabas has been added to the preachers of the Word.

Since he is familiar with these people, he will be able to minister in the area of their needs better, because he knows their needs.

Acts 11:24 "For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord."

This means that Barnabas was a man seeking to do God's will.

He was in right standing with God.

There was the power of the Holy Ghost in his ministry.

People who knew him would listen to him, because they had great respect for him.

These people were added unto the Lord, because Barnabas preached to them and they listened and received the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Acts 11:25 "Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul:"

“Tarsus”:

See note on 9:11.

“For to seek Saul”:

This was to be no easy task.

Several years had elapsed since Saul fled Jerusalem (9:30).

Apparently, he had been disinherited and forced to leave his home due to his new allegiance to Christianity (Phil. 3:8).

We will find that Saul (Paul), and Barnabas will minister together in many cities.

Barnabas has already led many to Christ at home, now he goes out as a missionary.

Tarsus is the capital of Cilicia and the birthplace of Saul.

Acts 11:26 "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."

“Christians”:

A term of derision meaning “of the party of Christ.” (26:28; 1 Peter 4:16).

The believers “were called Christians first in Antioch.”:

The name Christian was at first a derogatory term, referring to the people of the Christ.

Obviously the Antiochenes, constantly hearing the name of Christ, name these people such.

The Jews would never label them as Christians, because that would be tantamount to saying that these were the people of the messiah.

The term Christian occurs in only two other biblical passages (26:28; 1 Peter 4:16).

It seems that the power of the Holy Ghost operating through Saul and Barnabas caused the church to grow mightily for a whole year in Antioch.

A Christian is a follower of and a believer in Jesus Christ, so it would be correct to call them Christians (Christ like).

It seemed Christianity could grow freely here and the disciples came here sometime after Stephen had been martyred.

The most resistance to Christianity seemed to be in Jerusalem.

Verses 27-28

“Agabus” is the first prophet of the church to be so called.

He predicted a famine, which occurred during the reign of “Claudius” (A.D. 41-54).

Josephus, the first-century Jewish historian, describes such a famine occurring in “Judea” about A.D. 46.

Acts 11:27 "And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch."

“Prophets”:

Preachers of the New Testament (1 Cor. 14:32; Eph. 2:20; see notes on 13:1; 21:9; Eph. 4:11).

Prophet here means someone who foretells the future under the anointing of the Spirit of God.

Acts 11:28 "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."

“Agabus”:

One of the Jerusalem prophets who years later played an important part in Paul’s ministry (see 21:10-11).

“Great dearth”:

Several ancient writers (Tacitus [Annals XI.43], Josephus [Antiquities XXII.5], and Suetonius [Claudius 18] affirm the occurrence of great famines in Israel (ca. A.D. 45-46).

“Throughout all the world”:

The famine reached beyond the region of Palestine.

“Claudius Caesar”:

The nephew of Tiberius Caesar, Emperor of Rome, reigned from (A.D. 41-54).

Despite both physical and mental disabilities, Claudius ruled well during his early years.

Due to his several marriages, his latter years were marred by suspicion and intrigue as various mother-son duos schemed to inherit the empire.

One of his later wives, his niece Agrippina, persuaded him to make Nero, her son of a former marriage, heir instead of his own son, Britannicus.

In A.D. 54 Claudius chose to restore Britannicus as his successor, but before he could proclaim this, Agrippina poisoned him.

Claudius’s reign corresponds in time to the core events of Acts, so Luke fittingly refers to him twice (verse 28; 18:2).

No other emperor is personally mentioned in Acts.

The Caesar, to whom Paul appeals for justice, though unnamed, is Nero 25:8-12.

This Agabus was believed to be one of the 90 disciples of Christ.

His prediction came true in just one year from his prophecy.

The world meant here was probably the land of Judea.

Dearth means scarcity of food, famine, hunger.

Claudius Caesar was the Roman emperor in Power when this famine came.

Famines are many times, a way of getting people on their knees seeking God.

Acts 11:29 "Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea:"

We see here, Christians in Antioch sending help to their Christian brethren in Judea.

This is the first time recorded that this type of charitable acts were done by Christians.

We see by this, that they had begun to believe that all Christians then become sisters and brothers in Christ.

We are a family and this is the first time these Christians seemed to be aware of this.

Acts 11:30 "Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul."

“Elders”:

This is the first mention of the men who were pastor-overseers of the churches (15:4, 6, 22-23; 16:4; 21:18); i.e., a plurality of godly men responsible to lead the church (see notes on 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 5-9).

They soon began to occupy the leading role in the churches, transitioning from the apostles and prophets, who were foundational (Eph. 2:20; 4:11).

This practice of sending ministers to carry out our missions of good will was started here when Saul and Barnabas were entrusted with the funds to help those in need in Judea.

Saul and Barnabas were the first example of co-pastoring a church also.

Jesus had sent them out 2 by 2 to minister, but Saul and Barnabas actually pastored together.

Acts Chapter 11Continued Questions

1. Where did the disciples go after Stephen was stoned to death?
2. Who did they preach to?
3. Who were most of the population here?
4. What did they preach?
5. What was another name for Phenice?
6. Where is Cyprus located?
7. Who was Cyprus home to?
8. In verse 21, "And the _____ was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord."
9. Who must be the author of a sermon to win people to Christ?

10. Who sent Barnabas to Antioch?
11. What does exhorted mean?
12. What did Barnabas warn them not to do?
13. How was Barnabas described?
14. What two things was he full of?
15. Where did Barnabas go when he left?
16. Who did he go to meet?
17. What is the capital of Cilicia?
18. When Barnabas found him, where did they go?
19. How long did they stay here and preach?
20. Where were the disciples first called Christians?
21. What is a Christian?
22. Where was the most resistance to Christianity?
23. Where did the prophets come from to Antioch?
24. What does prophet mean in verse 27?
25. What was the name of the prophet who predicted famine in Judea?
26. What does dearth mean?
27. Who was the Roman emperor in power when the dearth came?
28. Verse 29 is the first example of what?
29. Who took the offering to Judea?