

## NOTES on Acts 11:19-30

### **BACKGROUND HIGHLIGHTS:**

#### *Antioch:*

- 3<sup>rd</sup> largest city in antiquity behind Rome and Alexandria (est. pop. of 500,000)<sup>1</sup>
- Cultural pluralism lead to less segregation than Alexandria and a more generally accepted Jewish element with many “God-fearers”<sup>2</sup>
- the seat of administration of the Roman province of Syria<sup>3</sup>
- it was a commercial center and a political capital<sup>4</sup>
- “Because of its situation between the urbanized Mediterranean world and the eastern desert, it was even more cosmopolitan than most Hellenistic cities. Here Christianity first displayed its cosmopolitan character.”<sup>5</sup>
- “Reputation for moral laxity enhanced by cult of Artemis and Apollo at Daphne, five miles distant, where the ancient Syrian worship of Astarte and her consort, with its ritual prostitution, was carried on under Greek nomenclature.”<sup>6</sup>

#### *Those preaching:*

- Scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen
  - “On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria” (8:1)
- Some spoke only to Jews
  - Up to this point, the Hellenized disciples “had confined their evangelizing activity to the Jewish communities of the various places to which they came.
  - “The idea that the gospel could have any relevance for non-Jews was not one that would naturally occur to them.”<sup>7</sup>
- Some spoke to Greeks
  - Men from Cyprus and Cyrene – they took a step out in faith!
  - Telling the good news of the gospel (euaggelizw): that Jesus is Lord.
    - “the Greek terms for ‘Lord’ and ‘Savior’ were widely current in the religious world of the eastern Mediterranean.”<sup>8</sup>
  - So these men were not ignorant about their methods or their audience
  - “The scale of Gentile evangelization in Antioch was something entirely new” for the spreading Church. Before Antioch, it was individual Gentiles coming to faith in Jesus, not a large number from one specific area.

#### Church of those in Jerusalem:

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<sup>1</sup> Keener, Craig S. The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993: 354.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Bruce, F. F. The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Book of Acts, Revised. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988: 224.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 225.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

-“They considered themselves responsible for the direction of the movement in all its extensions.”<sup>9</sup>

### Barnabas

- Barnabas was chosen, or possibly volunteered, to investigate the spread of the Gospel to the Gentiles
  - He “was a Cypriot Jew by birth, like some of those who had begun to preach the gospel to the Antiochene Gentiles, and his sympathies would in any case be wider than those of such Jerusalem believers as had never set foot outside Judaea.”<sup>10</sup>
- Had “sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet” (4:36)—he’s generous, a servant’s mindset and heart
- His original name is Joseph, but it was changed to Barnabas (son of encouragement) (4:36)—he’s encouraging, a leader’s mindset and heart
- Testified on behalf of Saul after his Damascus road experience before the Jerusalem disciples, convincing them that they no longer needed to be afraid of him (9:26-28).

### Saul of Tarsus

- Years had gone by since his conversion, and it is likely that he had already been doing evangelism to Gentiles, and Barnabas probably knew about it
- He was difficult to find (intended meaning of the verb, anazhtevw) because he was probably staying hidden from those trying to kill him (9:29-30)
- Tarsus was about 100 miles to the north—not an easy trek!

### The Christians in Antioch:

- The church in Antioch was diverse. It had Jews and Gentiles. They were not quarreling amongst each other at this point...their diversity was not a roadblock or hindrance for a unified witness to the rest of the city.
  - “racial and religious differences which loomed so large in Judaea seemed much less important here.”<sup>11</sup>
- Apparently, the church in Antioch was not a quiet bunch. They received the name “Christian”—the Christ people from outsiders.
  - “Christians occurs in the NT only here, as a nickname given by outsiders, and in 1 Peter 4:16, as something like a legal charge. The title is formed on the analogy of adherents to a political party: the “Caesarians,” the “Herodians,” the “Pompeianians” and so forth. Antiochans were known for making fun of people, but Christians in the second century decided to adopt the title with pride.”<sup>12</sup>
- New converts (and most likely any Christians in the area) received instruction from Saul and Barnabas on the way to live out the Gospel for an entire year.
  - God added to them a great number of people

### Famine:

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 226.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 228.

<sup>12</sup> Keener, 354.

- “A series of famines devastated Mediterranean agriculture in the time of Claudius.”<sup>13</sup>
- “We know that Judaea did in fact suffer severely from a famine at some point between A.D. 45-48. The Jerusalem church in the apostolic age appears to have suffered from chronic poverty.”<sup>14</sup>

## IN CONTEXT

Acts 11:19-30 comes right after Peter has just explained his “foreign” actions concerning Gentiles, which God revealed to him in a vision. He explains that the Holy Spirit came on the Gentiles after hearing the Gospel as it did on them at Pentecost; therefore, the Church should no longer make distinctions about who is able to hear the Gospel. It is for the Gentiles just as much as it is for the Jews. God makes a clear demonstration of this at the Church in Antioch. The mother-church in Jerusalem and its leaders should no longer wonder about the fate of the Gentiles.

The spread of Christianity in Antioch began because of the persecution that scattered many Jewish Christians across the Mediterranean world. Some of them ended up in Antioch. In Antioch, they preached the Gospel to the Jews, and some thought outside the box and began to preach to the Gentiles. The message fell on fertile soil in Antioch, and the church there grew tremendously amongst the Gentiles. This is the first time in Acts that such a massive amount of Gentiles are added to the church. In Luke’s recounting of the spread of Christianity, this account of the church in Antioch is the first shift from the Jewish converts to the Gentile converts. Much of the rest of Acts focuses on Paul’s efforts to reach the Gentile world and make his way back to Jerusalem.

## Possible Ideas for Sermon on “The Spiritually Dynamic Church”

Themes that characterize the church in Antioch:

1. Their **faith** was a **worldview**, not a piece of furniture or painting in the room of life.
  - They knew the difficulty of persecution
  - They had seen Stephen’s witness and preaching just before he was stoned
  - They were telling people that Jesus is Lord—Savior and Lord
  - They were willing to take potentially dangerous steps of faith:
    - They engaged people—they spoke with them; they took the initiative
    - They proclaimed the message of the Gospel to the Gentiles when this was not the norm—maybe like Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, Atheists today
2. The **grace of God** was evident in their lives
  - Barnabas noticed it
  - They stayed committed to the Lord with all their hearts
    - Barnabas certainly played a huge role in this, encouraging them to continue on in their faith
    - They recognized that and lived like Jesus Christ is Lord
      - The Head of the Church
      - The reason for living; the reason for dying, if necessary
  - They accepted both Jews and Gentiles—and both responded to the Gospel positively

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 355.

<sup>14</sup> Bruce, 230.

3. They continued to **go deeper** in their knowledge of God as a **community**
  - Discipleship happened
    - Barnabas found Saul and brought him up to Antioch to help him instruct the recent converts in the way of the Lord
4. They were **externally focused!**
  - They got the name “Christian” because outsiders recognized them as people who followed this Christ character from a few years back
  - They clearly were not keeping him a secret—people knew about Him even though He was no longer on the scene in His physical body
  - They later send out Saul and Barnabas, following the lead of the Holy Spirit, to explain the Gospel to more people in the Mediterranean world (13:1-3).
  - People knew what the church in Antioch was about—there was no guessing
    - It was not political
    - It was not simply about morality
    - It was about “Jesus is Lord.”
5. This church displayed **unity** in house, and **unity** with other churches.
  - Racial reconciliation—they were unified even though this was a cosmopolitan collection
  - They went to sacrificial lengths to establish a connection and affection for the church in Jerusalem—they were strategically generous:
    - “The church of Antioch similarly organized a relief fund for the mother-church. Such an act of fellowship was calculated to strengthen the bond of a common faith which linked the totally Jewish-Christian church of Jerusalem with the mainly Gentile-Christian church of Antioch.”<sup>15</sup>
    - What efforts are we making? What efforts should we be making?
6. The church in Antioch **grew**
  - A “great number” of people were added to the church
    - 11:21, 24, 26
  - The Lord’s hand was with them (11:21)
  - A key theme in all of Acts—God adds to their number
    - 1 Cor. 3:6 – they plant and water seeds....God does the growing

**POTENTIALLY USABLE QUOTE I LIKED:**

“Give me one hundred men who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God, and I care not whether they be clergymen or laymen, they alone will shake the gates of Hell and set up the Kingdom of Heaven upon the earth.”

- John Wesley

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.