

WEDNESDAY BIBLE STUDY

ACTS Chapter 11 part 2 (ESV p. 1019)

Verse 19- We are reminded that the disciples of Jesus scattered away from Jerusalem after Stephen's death. They traveled as far as Phoenicia (approximately 75 – 100+ miles directly north from Judea), Cyprus (roughly 254 miles northwest from Judea), and Antioch (approximately 300 miles north from Judea). All three were trade cities because of their locations near the Mediterranean sea and Antioch was on the Orontes river which feeds into the Mediterranean sea. Antioch was the third largest city in the Roman empire. It was known for its big, beautiful temples and baths. It was a major hub for caravans from Persia and Asia because of its roads that went north to south and east to west. It was also known for its pagan and immoral practices. Many of the people there worshipped the goddess Daphne, a figure in Greek mythology. They were known for gambling and riotous living. The city became a symbol of immoral lifestyle similar to how Las Vegas might be considered today. The name Antioch means in Greek, "resistant" or "holding out." So, because of its reputation and the Jewish traditions, most of the disciples that went to these cities spoke only to the Jews.

Verse 20- Still, somehow a few of the scattered disciples ended up in Antioch teaching the Greeks about the Lord Jesus Christ. It is interesting to note that they were from Cyprus and Cyrene. Cyprus was the coastal city that Barnabas was from. Cyrene was a Greek colony in North Africa (about 800 miles west of Judea). It also had a huge Jewish population. You may remember that Simon of Cyrene was the one who helped to carry Jesus' cross on the way to His crucifixion. Amazing that these men from so far away would go to Antioch to spread the word of Jesus Christ. The next verse tells us why.

Verse 21- "The Lord's hand was with them." This means that they had God's approval, his protection, and his guidance. (Isaiah 41:10- ESV p 670), (John 10:29- ESV p 993). (1 Peter 5:6-ESV p 1119)

Verse 22- When the disciples in Jerusalem heard what was happening in Antioch they sent Barnabas to investigate. Why Barnabas? (Acts 4:36-37- ESV p 1011) and (Acts 9:26-27- ESV p 1016) Barnabas was named Joseph at birth which means in Hebrew, "he will add" or "may God increase." But, when the disciples got to know him, they gave him a new name derived from two Hebrew words, "bar" which means "son" and "nabas" which means "to speak by divine inspiration", "to encourage or console". They renamed him according to his character, "the son who speaks by divine inspiration, who encourages and consoles." What a testimony.

Verse 23- Barnabas lived up to his name when he arrived at Antioch.

1-He attributed all that had happened to the grace of God. (Ephesians 2:8-ESV p 1079), (Titus 2:11- ESV p. 1100)

2-He was glad about what he saw. (Psalm 13:5- ESV p 500), (Luke 15:7 and 10- ESV p 969)

3- He encouraged them all. (Hebrews 3:13- ESV p 1104), (Ephesians 4:29- ESV p 1081)

4-He advised them to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. (Hosea 12:6- ESV p 845), (Proverbs 3:5-6- ESV p 588)

Verse 24- Here Luke (author of Acts) describes the life of Barnabas as if he is giving us a formula for winning souls. He uses the Greek word for good, “agathos,” which means, having a nature that is useful, agreeable, distinguished, upright, and honorable.

The formula:

A good character + led by the Holy Spirit + faith (true belief) = many souls won for the Lord. (Matthew 5:14-16, ESV p 898), (1 Peter 2:12, ESV p 1117), (Colossians 3:17, ESV p 1088)

Verse 25- Then, Barnabas did not just give them advice and leave. He went to Tarsus to find Saul. He knew that Saul would probably be there because that is where the other disciples had sent him to save his life. It was Saul’s home/birthplace. (Acts 9:29-30- ESV p 1016) Barnabas went to get help with what he wanted to do next. (Proverbs 27:17, ESV p 611), (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, ESV p 618)

Verse 26- When Saul and Barnabas returned to Antioch, they stayed a full year teaching and building them up. (1 Peter 5:2-4- ESV p 1119), (Jeremiah 3:15- ESV p 702) During this stay, the believers were given a new name. They began to be called, “Christians.” This was derived from the Greek word, “Christos” which means Anointed One/Messiah, and the Latin suffix- “ianos” which means belonging to or associated with.” Thus, the literal meaning is “associated with The Anointed One.” It is doubtful that its first use was meant to be flattering, but it came to be a term that believers took pride in.

Verse 27- Then, God sent prophets from Jerusalem to Antioch to announce to his people what was about to happen. (Deuteronomy 18:18-22- ESV p179), (1 Corinthians 14:3- ESV p 1062), (Amos 3:7- ESV p 853)

Verse 28- Agabus, the prophet predicted a famine. It happened just as he had predicted. History records it as taking place during Claudius Caesar’s reign and affecting the entire Roman world- Judea, Turkey (Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch), Syria, Egypt, and Rome. It caused rioting in Rome against the emperor and caused many deaths.

Verse 29-30- The disciples, especially those at Antioch approached this tragedy with faith and generosity, following the example of Barnabas. Although they suffered the famine too, they decided to help their brothers and sisters in Judea, “each man according to his ability.” (2 Corinthians 8:12- ESV p 1070), (2 Corinthians 9:7- ESV p 1071), (Deuteronomy 16:17- ESV p 178), (1 Peter 4:10- ESV p 1119) And Barnabas and Saul carried their gifts back to the brothers and sisters in Judea.