

Episode 1204 - Acts 11 Part 2-Barnabas at Antioch

I. Acts is unique in the New Testament. Rather than the ministry of Jesus Christ on earth, it focuses on what came after, when the Lord had ascended back into heaven. The Lord left His disciples with many commands to carry out, and Acts tells us how they did them.

II. In Acts 11 we saw that Peter was called to Jerusalem to defend having gone to a Gentile, something none of the apostles understood it to be their mission to do. When Peter explained how he had been led every step of the way to do this by the Spirit of God, however, they yielded to His will, glorifying Him for having granted to Gentiles to receive submission to life.

III. The Heralds Reach Antioch. Acts 11:19-21.

- A. Verse 19. We return to the progress of the gospel that went out from Jerusalem by those in the great scattering after the stoning of Stephen.
 1. Every one of those carrying the gospel was part of the great unity in Acts 2-7. Philip was an example of these men in chapter 8.
 2. We watched as the word went north through Judea, up through Samaria, and up into and throughout the regions of Galilee. Now, it travels outside Israel.
 - a. Phoenicia bordered Galilee on the northwest, along the Mediterranean.
 - b. Cyprus was an island off the coast of Phoenicia.
 - c. Antioch was a city in Syria, the country north of Israel.
 3. There is no change in this. They did go everywhere preaching the word just as we saw in Acts 8 when they went everywhere proclaiming the word after the stoning of Stephen. Yet the record is that they proclaimed the word to no one but to the Jews only.
 4. Though these were lands of the Gentiles, they only preached the word to the Jews living there. Once again, we see that the events in Cornelius' household were an odd exception. The commission God had given them included only the children of Israel. As yet there was no gospel open to the Gentiles.
 5. They traveled far, but they were fulfilling God's purpose that every Jew on earth would have a clean-cut, clear-cut opportunity to believe, and not that the gospel be carried to the Gentiles.
- B. Verse 20. We know some from the unity in Jerusalem were from Cyprus (Acts 4:36) and Cyrene (Acts 2:10). These arrive at Antioch, the capital of Syria at this time, located about sixteen miles from the sea (according to the *Companion Bible*). Here they herald not only to the Jews, but also to the Hellenists.
 1. Who were these Hellenists? Acts 6:1. They were Jews who could not speak Aramaic (the language of Israel), but only Greek.
 2. Since the word had only been proclaimed in Israel up to this point, it was preached exclusively in Aramaic. Out here beyond its borders, it now needed to be proclaimed in other languages. For the first time since they started their mission, the word was being proclaimed in a language other than Aramaic, the native language of Israel at the time.
 3. Some manuscripts have "Hellenes," "Greeks," rather than Hellenists. Then some make these out to be Gentiles. But this makes no sense compared with verse 19. Acts 15 at the Jerusalem Council makes it clear that Cornelius was the only precedent for giving the gospel to a Gentile that the apostles were aware of before Paul.

C. Verse 21. The Lord was approving of the work of these heralds, and so He worked with them, and many believed. Mark 16:20. A great number, and therefore this is ever growing. Yet with the exception of the household of Cornelius, every one of these was a Jew who believed. That they “turned to the Lord” does not prove that they were godless men before this point, for the same thing is said of men in towns in Israel in Acts 9:35.

IV. The Mission of Barnabas. Acts 11:22-26.

- A. Verse 22. The *ekklesia* in Jerusalem was not some religious organization that existed there, but the out-called, out-positioned men there, every one of them having a position out of Jesus Christ, all standing as the *ekklesia* of God. Probably this was particularly the twelve. It is their responsibility to aid those who have now come to faith. This time, they don’t send any of the twelve, but instead their beloved brother Barnabas (this is the same Barnabas as we saw in Acts 4:36-37 and Acts 9:27). He will do his work of acting as an encourager to the people of Antioch. “News” = Greek *logos*, John 1. “Sent” = Greek *exapostello*, *apostello* = “to send with authority,” *ex* = “out.” Thus, they “apostled out” Barnabas. He was the apostle of the twelve, sent by them with their authority.
- B. Verse 23. The grace of God held out to men should always make us glad, especially when we see them responding positively to it! Barnabas encouraged or entreated all these believers. New believers are often enthusiastic, but they need encouragement to continue with the Lord, for the pull of this world is strong, and can lead them back away from Him.
- C. Verse 24. Now the Lord assures us of Barnabas’ character. “Holy spirit” = Greek *pnaumatos hagiou*, “spirit holy” without the article “the,” and thus indicates the power of the Spirit, not His Person. Notice holy power and faith go together here. Barnabas does not just encourage, but also a great many people (a crowd) were added to the Lord after his arrival. These words indicate that the vast majority of Jews in Antioch, both those who spoke Aramaic and those who spoke only Greek, had become believers in the Lord Jesus Christ by this time. But Barnabas was not going to the Gentiles. He was not God’s apostle to the Gentiles, so he could not do this. Paul was the one God was going to commission to the Gentiles. In verse 21 we saw a great number of people turned to the Lord, now we see a great many people added to the Lord again. The faith in Jesus Christ continues to grow!
- D. Verse 25. Barnabas is not satisfied, for he wishes his friend Saul to join his work. He heads for Saul’s hometown seeking him. The Holy Spirit may have been behind this.
- E. Verse 26. Barnabas brings Saul back to Antioch.
 - 1. For a year, they assemble with the out-positioned and teach a great many people.
 - 2. Saul is a teacher, having learned much in the years since his conversion.
 - 3. The church, *ekklesia*, were the outcalled people in Antioch.
 - 4. This was the first time the name “Christians” was used. Antioch was outside the land of Israel, and the word “Christians” is a Greek word, and here is the first we have of Greek-speaking believers. “Christians” was apparently given to them by outsiders, so some think it was originally perhaps an insulting term. Could mean something along the lines of “little christs” or “little messiahs,” meaning they mocked them that they thought they were little

saviors. This is the first of three times it is used in Scripture. Acts 26:28 is also a mocking use of the word. In I Peter 4:16, Peter speaks of men suffering under this label, and suggests that rather than being ashamed to be called this belittling term, they should glorify God that they are worthy to suffer under this name. It was only in the next century after this that people started to wear this term as a badge of honor.

5. Few who take this title seem concerned with living the lifestyle it implies. Everyone seems to have their own idea of what a Christian is, but most mean just someone who belongs to the religion “Christianity.” The phrase “believer” might be a better term, and lead to a better question, “What do you believe?” rather than “Which denomination?”

V. Conclusion: Though Cornelius and his Gentile household believed, still the word that went out in Acts 11 was carried by God’s heralds to Jews only. Now, for the first time, it was proclaimed in Greek rather than Aramaic in the countries north of Israel. Barnabas was sent by the twelve to back up this work. He had a great ministry there, but desired to be joined in Antioch by Saul, whom he sent for. Believers were first called Christians in Antioch, and yet perhaps there are better names to call ourselves than this.