

Acts 11b 11:19-30

19 See Acts 8:1,4 The persecution that came about during the time of Stephen got the Jerusalem church to finally obey Acts 1:8. Up to this time, the Christian church was entirely Jewish, though Samaritans had also been converted. They were still considered Jews. Phoenicia is about 75 miles northwest of Jerusalem and Antioch 300 miles to the north. Cyprus is an island in the Mediterranean. Antioch was the third largest Roman city with a population of about 300,000. It was the capital of Syria. Can God allow unpleasant circumstances that help us to do His will?

20 Cyrenaica was a province on the coast of North Africa. Believers that had originally been from there and Cyprus went to Antioch and began to share about Jesus as the Messiah. They were hellenistic Jews that spoke Greek. Did they hear about Peter's testimony? Whatever prompted them, they did something out of the norm by sharing with Gentile Greeks. They may have been "God-fearers" (Gentiles interested in Judaism) or they may have been worshipping some of the many Greek gods that the city worshipped. Why is it called "good news"?

21 A great many converts came into the faith and the church of Antioch grew. That is what we should be praying takes place right here. We need what they needed, the hand of the Lord. 1Kings 18:46 (NIV has power instead of hand) 2Kings 3:15; Luke 1:66 In each of these texts, it appears to be the activity of the Holy Spirit. The hand of God makes ministry successful. May His hand be upon us!

22-23 Barnabas was originally from Cyprus (4:36) so he could identify with those who were evangelizing there. The assistance from Jerusalem was supportive or they would have sent a non-hellenized Jew. He was probably sent to keep the unity of the church and clarity in doctrine. He saw evidence of the grace of God. What does that look like? Do you see it in our fellowship? Then he did what all overseers should do, encouraged them to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.

24-25 Upon evidence of great success, Barnabas didn't start the Pastor Barnabas Mega Church, Inc., instead, he went to look for someone to help him preach and teach. He knew Saul/Paul was nearby and that Saul was not only knowledgeable about God's word, but had a God given calling to reach Gentiles. 9:15 Tarsus was 100 miles away and the Greek wording implies a search to find him, but he needed help.

26 Saul agreed to come and help and for one year they disciplined the new believers. This took place sometime between 39 and 44 AD. Though it is not

mentioned in Scripture, there was an uprising of persecution against Jews in Syria at the same time. Many Jews were tortured and killed. Synagogues were burned and homes destroyed. It seems to have all been connected with Caligula insisting that he be worshipped as god. He even insisted on his image being set up in the temple, but the governor of Judea defied his order. Before Caligula could respond, he was assassinated. The High Priest sent 30,000 Jewish soldiers to Antioch to retaliate and killed many Gentiles. The emperor intervened and had the High Priest Phineas beheaded. Did Christian Jew and Gentile escape this horror by not fitting in to either category?

The term Christian (follower of Christ) was probably derived to distinguish them from other Jews. The nomenclature didn't really take hold until after the first century. Ignatius made it popular, and he happened to be from Antioch.

27-28 Early church writings had several criteria to discern a false prophet. Does he exhibit the Lord's ways? Does he ask for money? Is his life inconsistent with his prophecies? Is he gentle, quiet, and humble? Does he refrain from evil? Good standards even for today!

We will see Agabus again in 21:10-11. He accurately predicted this famine and Paul's arrest. Luke mentions two other prophets and the daughters of Philip as prophetesses. In AD 40-41 Egypt had a shortage of grain which affected the Roman Empire. 44-47 also saw the same shortages that caused inflated prices. Jerusalem was particularly hard hit because they had refused to plant when Caligula ordered his statue erected in the Temple. The next year was a Sabbatical year in which they let the ground rest. Only three years later the shortages hit on top of the already scarce supply of grain in Judea. Claudius reigned from 41 to 54. Claudius expelled Jews from Rome in AD 49.

29 See 1Corinthians 16:2; 2Corinthians 8:2-4; 12-14 Paul suggested people give cheerfully according to their ability and as God directed them. He didn't want people to give to the extent that they suffered, but believed if everyone gave as they could it would be enough for all.

30 Saul and Barnabas took the funds to the elders in Jerusalem. This is one of the early clues as to how the church operated under a plurality of elders. Equal accountable elders sought the Lord together for direction. We will see an example of that applied to Antioch in a later chapter. Galatians 1 and 2 refer to this visit to Jerusalem. Paul brought up the outside influence insisting that Gentile converts keep the Law. See Galatians 2:1-10 The overseers told them to keep up the good work and encourage the converts to remember the poor which was exactly what they had just done.