

A SURVEY OF THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

8. CALLED CHRISTIANS FIRST IN ANTIOCH Acts 11:26

Adult Sunday School
Gethsemane Baptist Church
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CALLED CHRISTIANS FIRST IN ANTIOCH

Acts 11:26

When the Lord started the church in Jerusalem, He wanted His people to tell the Gospel to everyone. His instructions to them were, *“ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”* (Acts 1:8b) This expansion to the rest of the world began in chapter eight. It was brought about by the persecution that began with the martyrdom of Stephen. The church sent preachers all across the region and many people believed on Jesus and were saved. As the Gentiles began to believe and be filled with the Holy Ghost the church leadership in Jerusalem became concerned for the purity of worship and fidelity to the Law. Peter explained to them, *“Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?”* (Vs. 11:17) The conclusion of the church leaders was that they, *“glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.”* (vs. 18b)

Verse 19 of chapter 11 shows us a break in the ongoing narrative and takes us back to the beginning of the persecution to show the reader just how far the Gospel had spread. *“Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and*

Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only." (Vs. 19) The disciples only preached Jesus to the Jews. These men of Cypress and Cyrene began to reach the Grecians in Antioch. This was a sign of the movement of the Gospel into the rest of the world. Greek was the common language of commerce for the day. Those who believed the Gospel and spoke Greek were able to take the message of Jesus much further and to more people than the disciples could have ever done before. The Lord is sending His Word around the world.

When the Jerusalem church heard that many Greek people were trusting Christ, they sent Barnabas to Antioch. He *"exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord."* (vs. 23) Barnabas then brought Saul into the picture to help teach those new believers about their faith in Christ. They were so effective that the *"disciples were called Christians first in Antioch."* (Vs. 26b) God was preparing his servants Barnabas and Saul for their ministry to the Greek, or gentile world.

Verses 27 – 30 of chapter eleven tells us a little about the church in Jerusalem. First, the gift of prophecy included not just the telling forth of truth but also the foretelling of events. Agabus, a prophet from Jerusalem, was one that told them of a famine that was coming to Jerusalem. They did not yet have the completed Word of God so God spoke through these prophets. Next, we learn of the poverty of the

church in Jerusalem. Paul spoke of this in I Corinthians 16 and II Corinthians 9. We also see the spirit of generosity that was in the church at Antioch.

A new wave of persecution began about this time. Herod Agrippa, I had rule over Palestine during the reign of Claudius Caesar. "He maintained his power by cultivating the favor of Judaism." (Kent. P. 101) He made the object of his attack the Apostles, themselves. He executed James, the son of Zebedee and when he saw how this pleased the Jews, he sought to kill Peter also. Peter was arrested just before the Feast of Passover and held in prison during the feast waiting to be executed. God is very concerned about His children. Sometimes He allows them to lay down their lives for His sake. There are times, however that He does deliver them and avenges the cruelty that is carried out against them.

In this section of Acts, we see both of these things. James was killed by Herod. Peter was miraculously delivered from prison and death. James testified of God's faithfulness by his death while Peter illustrated God's faithfulness by his deliverance. Herod died later in a very painful way because of his arrogance and blasphemy.

God had a specific job for Saul and Barnabas during all of these activities. After the prophecy concerning the famine by Agabus they returned to Jerusalem with the relief sent by the church at Antioch. They remained there a time and "*Barnabas and Saul*

returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry.” (Vs. 12:25) Upon returning from Jerusalem to Antioch they taught the brethren and ministered in the church.

The result of the persecution and scattering was *“the word of God grew and multiplied.”* (Vs. 24) Barnabas and Saul ministered in the church in Antioch for a length of time. It was from there the Holy Ghost called them to their missionary ministry. Chapter 13 begins the story of Saul’s first trip to preach in Asia and the other missionary journeys.

Ideas to consider:

1) How was God preparing his servant for a ministry to the gentiles?

2) How do we see the deliverance of God in both the death of James and the release of Peter?

3) What can we infer about the place of the local church in modern missions by the fact that Paul and Barnabas were called to the mission field while they were working in the church in Antioch?

Notes:
