

ACTS 11:19-30 OPERATION SHIFT: ANTIOCH REPLACES JERUSALEM AS THE CENTER OF CHRISTIAN WITNESS

Luke now picks up the narrative where he left off in 8:4 - the scattering of disciples due to the persecution that arose after the martyrdom of Stephen. These Jewish believers travel up the coast into and beyond the great commercial centers of Phoenicia all the way to Antioch, about 300 miles north of Jerusalem. Some even go to the Island of Cyprus. Luke is introducing us to the beginnings of an assembly in Antioch, a thriving metropolis on the Orontes River that henceforth will replace Jerusalem as the center of evangelism.

11:19-21 Gentiles Get Saved in Antioch

v. 19 **Phenice** is the geographical area of _____, a strip of coastline about 120 miles long (current Lebanon) known for maritime trade; it included the commercial centers of Tyre, Sidon and Byblos.

Cyprus is the island bearing the same name today; it was a very convenient stopping, refurbishing center for the Mediterranean shipping business in Old and New Testament times.

Antioch (in Syria) was the _____ largest city in the Roman Empire; estimated population at this time – 500,000!

- on the crossroads of western and eastern commerce;
- made a free city by Pompey in 64 BC (self-governed);
- seat of the provincial administration of Cilicia-Syria;
- located 15 miles inland from Seleucia on the Orontes River; famous for its lax morals – the New Orleans of Paul’s day;
- given over to Greek cults and their ritual prostitution.

v. 20 To this Antioch came Hellenist-Jewish-Christians who began evangelizing Gentiles.

Literally, v. 20 reads “and some of them...spake* to the Greeks, telling the good news of the Lord Jesus.”**

*spake = laleo, indicating the evangelism was conversational, personal. This same verb is poorly translated “preaching” in v. 19 (KJV).

**preaching (KJV) = evangelizing, evaggelizomai

Whereas to Jews, Jesus was preached as Messiah/Lord; to Gentiles, he is preached as Lord. Very logical.

v. 21 “...a great number believed (aorist participle) and turned (aorist verb) to (epi) the Lord.”

THIS MARKS A MOMENTOUS BUT QUIET TURNING POINT IN THE EARLY CHURCH; THE GENTILES IN LARGE NUMBERS TURN TO THE LORD. A NEW CHAPTER IN CHURCH HISTORY BEGINS. ANTIOCH BECOMES THE HUB, A CENTER OF GENTILE CHRISTIANITY. Apparently, these events happen just after the conversion of the house of Cornelius.

11:22-24 News Prompts the Jerusalem Church to Send Barnabas

v. 22 **The Man:** “And they sent forth _____, that he should go as far as Antioch.” _____ means “son of consolation or exhortation,” “son of comfort;” his name reflects his gift and character; he was an encourager.

- He was a Cyprian Jew, a Levite, an early convert to Christianity (5:36);
- He convinced the Apostles of the verity of Paul’s conversion (9:27);
- He searches out and brings Paul to Antioch (11:25, 26);
- He is sent with Paul by the Holy Spirit on the first journey (13:2);
- He defends the reality of Gentile conversion at the Council of Jerusalem; 15:2, 22, 25.

(OVER)

v. 23, 24a **The Message:** “*Who...having seen the grace of God, he rejoiced.*” No questions, no doubts, no additions; simply joy!

“**he kept on (imperfect active indicative) _____ them.**”

“**with purpose of heart to abide or remain resting upon the Lord.**”

Barnabas encouraged them to make a fixed determination or purpose in their frame of reference; that of abiding in and resting upon the Lord Jesus Christ. Note the passion and direction of Barnabas’ message; no cold, calculating, impassioned Calvinist was this man.

v. 24b **The Result:** “*Much people was added to the _____.*” Literally, “a considerable multitude was added (aorist passive indicative) to the _____.”

v. 25 Barnabas senses the need for help. The dimensions of the ministries demanded it; teaching, exhorting, evangelizing a cosmopolitan city where Jews and Gentiles, Greeks and barbarians rubbed shoulders, where Mediterranean culture met that of the Near East. Saul of Tarsus comes to mind, so Barnabas seeks him out. Some 5-7 years (some say 9) have passed since Saul’s (Paul’s) conversion.

“**to seek**” = **anazetesai** = “**to search out with difficulty**”

Apparently, Paul was not easy to find; most likely he had been disinherited and rejected because of his Christian conversion. “*For whom I have suffered the loss of all things...*” (Phil. 3:8) may well refer to this period of his life.

v. 26 “*...he found him*”

“*...he brought him to Antioch*”

“*...they assembled with the assembly (the church)*”

...they taught for one whole year. WOW! WHAT A YEAR!

“**AND THE DISCIPLES WERE FIRST CALLED ‘CHRISTIANS’ in Antioch.**” “**Christians**” = “**the Christ people;**” about the year 43-44 AD. They are first called this by others; see also 26:28.

11:27-30 Humanitarian Relief from Antioch Believers to Jerusalem Believers

v. 27, 28 **Prophets:** those with the gift to foretell (also forth tell); this gift was foundational to the Church before the canon of Scripture was complete (Eph. 2:20). Here it is used by the Holy Spirit to relieve the future physical needs of the believers in Jerusalem.

dearth or famine in the days of Claudius Caesar; Claudius reigned from 41-54 AD, a period marked by a succession of poor harvests and famines throughout the empire (Suetonius, Tacitus, Dio Cassius all testify to this in their histories).

v. 29, 30 The Gentile-Christian assembly comes to the rescue of the Jewish-Christian assembly via totally voluntary offerings. We are approximately in the year 46 AD. The church sends these gifts by the hands of Paul and Barnabas. Question: In what form? If cash, the grain purchased in Jerusalem would be very expensive - perhaps cash and a caravan of grain. (This visit of Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem is most likely that referred to in Galatians 2:1-8.)

ANTIOCH ON THE ORONTES:

- Serves as Paul’s home church.
- Sends out Paul and his teams on three missionary journeys.
- Sends Paul and Barnabas to the Jerusalem Council to defend Gentile salvation apart from Jewish ritual and law.
- Becomes a key center of evangelism for the next 300 years!