

# A Church God Blesses

## Devotional

In Acts 11:19 we find ourselves at exactly the same point in time (or so it would seem) as Acts 8:1–4. We are taken back in time to the persecution which arose on account of Stephen, and to the scattering of the church. In Acts 8:4–11:17 Luke has described the way in which the gospel was proclaimed and received in all of Judea and Samaria. When Luke takes up the persecution and scattering of the church in Jerusalem in Acts 11:19 and following, he does so to show the propagation of the gospel to the Gentiles, with the first major church founded being at Antioch.

But if our text is a step back in time, it is easily two steps forward for the gospel. Not only are Gentiles saved, but an entire Gentile city—Antioch—is impacted with the gospel, an impact which will continue to grow long after the lives and ministries of men like Barnabas and Saul. It is, in fact, this church at Antioch which God ordained to be the launching pad for the gospel to many nations. It is from Antioch that Barnabas and Saul (Acts 13:1), soon to become “Paul and Barnabas” (Acts 13:4ff.), will be sent forth as missionaries. It is also Antioch which will play an interesting role with Jerusalem. It will be ministered to by those from Jerusalem, and it will, in turn, minister financially to those in Judea. It will also be the church in Antioch which will respond to the heretical teaching of some from Judea, by sending Paul, Barnabas, and others to Jerusalem where the so-called “Jerusalem Council” will be convened which will make a landmark decision concerning the gospel and the Gentiles.

It is shortly to come in Acts that we will leave Jerusalem and press toward Rome, that we will leave Peter and the other apostles in Jerusalem, and turn to Paul. Acts chapter 12 is a farewell to Peter, by and large, and beginning at Acts 13 we will begin to accompany Paul and Barnabas as they go forth with the gospel, to the Jews first, and then to the Gentiles. We are, here, seeing a giant stride being taken by the church, as purposed by God and as achieved through His Holy Spirit, working through His church.

The last part of Acts 11 is something like the “tomb of the unknown soldier,” for honored here are great heroes of the faith, and yet men and women who are unnamed and unknown to us, but known to God. These are, for the time being, anonymous heroes, heroes who contrary to their culture, and even contrary to the practice and convictions of their own Christian peers, carry out the implications of the gospel and the commands of Christ. What great lessons this text has for us!<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon by Bob Deffinbaugh found @ <https://bible.org/seriespage/one-step-backward-and-two-steps-forward-acts-1119-30>

# Open it

## LUKE'S HOMETOWN?

Early Christian writers (Eusebius and Jerome) state that Luke, author of Acts, was a native of Antioch. He may have been one of the Greeks who came to Christ during the spiritual awakening of Acts 11. From this point, much of what is reported is based on the author's eyewitness accounts.<sup>2</sup>

1. Describe your hometown. Is it known for anything? What were the people like? Did you enjoy your time there?

# Read it

**Acts 11:19-30**

# Explore it

2. What event from Acts 7 and 8 does Luke rewind back to in verse 19?
3. How far had the gospel travelled according to our text?
4. How did the church respond when they heard about what was happening in Antioch?
5. Who did Barnabas enlist to help with the overwhelming response to the gospel?
6. What did the church of Antioch raise money to do?

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<sup>2</sup> Girard, Robert C.. The Book of Acts (The Smart Guide to the Bible Series) (Kindle Locations 2516-2520). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

# Apply it

When the saints were scattered abroad during Saul's persecution of the church (Acts 8:1), some of them ended up in Antioch, the capital of Syria, three hundred miles north of Jerusalem. (Don't confuse this city with Antioch in Pisidia, Acts 13:14.) There were at least sixteen Antiochs in the ancient world, but this one was the greatest.

With a population of half a million, Antioch ranked as the third largest city in the Roman Empire, following Rome and Alexandria. Its magnificent buildings helped give it the name "Antioch the Golden, Queen of the East." The main street was more than four miles long, paved with marble, and lined on both sides by marble colonnades. It was the only city in the ancient world at that time that had its streets lighted at night. A busy port and a center for luxury and culture, Antioch attracted all kinds of people, including wealthy retired Roman officials who spent their days chatting in the baths or gambling at the races.

With its large cosmopolitan population and its great commercial and political power, Antioch presented to the church an exciting opportunity for evangelism. Antioch was a wicked city, perhaps second only to Corinth. Though all the Greek, Roman, and Syrian deities were honored, the local shrine was dedicated to Daphne, whose worship included immoral practices. **"Antioch was to the Roman world what New York City is to ours,"** writes James A. Kelso in *An Archaeologist Follows the Apostle Paul*. **"Here where all the gods of antiquity were worshipped, Christ must be exalted."**<sup>3</sup>

7. Read verses 19–21. What things does Luke share in these verses that might have made starting a church in Antioch difficult?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
8. Why is it so important for Christians to understand the ethos of the communities that we live in? How can doing this help our evangelistic endeavors?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
9. What things hinder Christians and churches from reaching their communities with the gospel?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
10. Antioch was a unique city that would need a church that found unique ways to engage it with the gospel. Describe the city or area where you reside now. What types of people live there, and in what ways can you and your church uniquely serve and minister to the community around you?

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<sup>3</sup> Wiersbe, Warren W.. *Be Dynamic (Acts 1-12) (The BE Series Commentary)* (p. 162). David C. Cook. Kindle Edition.

## THE HAND OF GOD WAS UPON THEM

We know that God blessed their labors, for it is said, "*The hand of the Lord was with them.*" The hand is that with which one works. The hand of the Lord means the power of the Lord. These men did not go in their own name, with only their own strength. They had faith in Christ, and wherever they went—Christ went with them and wrought in them. When they spoke, His power was in their words. We must not think that this was simply a blessing for the apostolic days; it is as much for our own days as it was for the time in which this story belongs. Jesus commanded His disciples to go into all the world, to preach the gospel to every living creature, and He gave them the promise, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."<sup>4</sup>

11. In what ways do people experience the hand of God upon their lives today? Are you experiencing this personally? Why or Why not?

12. The Christians in Antioch knew God was with them, and that motivated them to take great risks for God. What risks are you willing to take for God, knowing He is always with you?

### **A ministry can't turn people to the Lord unless the hand of the Lord is with them.**

You can turn people to a personality without the hand of the Lord.

You can turn people to a social club without the hand of the Lord.

You can turn people to a church or an institution without the hand of the Lord.

**But you can't turn people to the Lord without the hand of the Lord.<sup>5</sup>**

13. People are drawn to churches that seem to have lots of whiz bang going on but are devoid of God's working. How does a church know if they are building something with the Lord's hand upon it?

14. How is the hand of God seen in your church today? What things can cause this blessing to cease?

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<sup>4</sup> Sermon by J.R. Miller found @ <http://articles.ochristian.com/article16730.shtml>

<sup>5</sup> <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/acts-11/>

## HERE COMES UPPER MANAGEMENT

By this time the leaders of the church at Jerusalem should have been accustomed to the relentless efforts of the Holy Spirit to widen the circle of the church. With each leap of the faith outside the comfortable confines of Jewish orthodoxy, they had carefully checked to verify that what was happening was the work of God. This time they sent Barnabas— on his first apostolic assignment. Barney was the right man for the job.

Barnabas accomplished four things in Antioch:

- He affirmed God was at work (Acts 11:23).
- He participated in successful evangelism (Acts 24).
- He linked up with Saul (Paul) to create an effective spiritual leadership team (Acts 11: 25–26).
- He and Saul successfully disciplined the new converts for a year (Acts 11:26).<sup>6</sup>

15. Why was it important for the Apostles to send someone to check up on the church in Antioch? What unseen consequences may have come if no one had been sent?

When the leaders of the church at Jerusalem got word of what was going on at Antioch, they naturally sent down to investigate the situation. It was by the grace of God they sent the man they did. They might have sent someone of a rigid mind who made a god of the Law and was shackled by its rules and regulations; but they sent the man with the biggest heart in the Church. Barnabas had already stood by Paul and sponsored him when all men suspected him (Acts 9:27). Barnabas had already given proof of his Christian love by his generosity to his needy brethren (Acts 4:36–37).<sup>7</sup>

16. How could the church of Antioch have responded initially to the visitor from Jerusalem? What things can cause cynicism between church leaders and church members? How do we defend against these temptations?

17. What leadership principles can any church leader learn from Barnabas' example in verses 23 and 24?

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<sup>6</sup> Girard, Robert C.. The Book of Acts (The Smart Guide to the Bible Series) (Kindle Locations 2534-2537). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

<sup>7</sup> Commentary on Acts by William Barclay found @ <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/dsb/acts-11.html>

## YOU WANT HIM TO BE OUR PASTOR?!?!

When Barnabas saw the Gentiles being swept into the fellowship of the Church he was glad; but he recognized that someone must be put in charge of this work. That someone must be a man with a double background, a Jew brought up in the Jewish tradition but one who could meet the Gentiles on equal terms. He must be a man of courage, for Antioch was no easy place to be a Christian leader; and he must be skilled in argument in order to meet the double attack of Jews and Gentiles.

Barnabas knew the very man. For nine years or so we have heard nothing of Paul. The last glimpse we had of him, he was escaping by way of Caesarea to Tarsus (Acts 9:30). No doubt for these nine years he had been witnessing for Christ in his native town; but now that the task for which he had been destined was ready for him, Barnabas with profound wisdom put him in charge of it.<sup>8</sup>

18. The church in Antioch was filled with people who left Jerusalem because of the persecution started by Saul, who now would become their pastor. What can we learn about both Saul/Paul and the Antiochian Christians that allowed this partnership to work?

Do we see this type of radical love among Christians today? Why or why not?

**It was in Antioch that the followers of Jesus were first called Christians.** The title began as a nickname. The people of Antioch were famous for their facility in finding nicknames. Later the bearded Emperor Julian came to visit them and they christened him "The Goat." **The term (ian) means belonging to the party of;** for instance Caesar(ian) means belonging to Caesar's party. Christ(ian) means: "These Christ-folk." It was a contemptuous nickname; but the Christians took it and made it known to all the world. **By their lives they made it a name not of contempt but of respect and admiration and even wonder.**<sup>9</sup>

19. The Christians at Antioch gave sacrificially to those in Judea in need of support. Why is generosity so closely tied to our calling as believers? In what ways can you grow in your generosity?

20. When people interact with you, do they see you as one of those "Christ-folk"? In what ways do the Christians at Antioch serve as a model of what Christlikeness looks like?

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

Note: This study was compiled and questions were written by Pastor Tim Badal, Village Bible Church. [www.villagebible.org/smallgroups](http://www.villagebible.org/smallgroups)