

# Abounding Grace Christian Church

## The Acts of the Holy Spirit through the Church – Part 37

### I. Exposition of Chapter Eleven (Continued).

#### A. Verses 19-30 – Barnabas, Saul and the Church at Antioch.

1. Verses 19-21 - The church in Antioch grows as Gentiles turn to the Lord (Continued). a. Verse 21 – “**And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.**” – The phrase “...hand of the Lord...” is explained well by Dr. Stanley Horton who writes:

“**This expression is often used in the Bible to mean the power of the Lord or even the Spirit of the Lord (as in Ezek. 1:3; 3:14,22,24; 8:1; 11:1). Certainly, the miracle-working power of the Lord was triumphantly manifest, confirming the Word as in Samaria (Acts 8:5-8); ‘a great number...believed and turned to the Lord.’**”<sup>1</sup>

b. The “**hand of the Lord**” is still needed and available in order for great numbers of people to turn to the Lord!

#### 2. Verses 22-26- Barnabas and Saul in Antioch.

a. Verse 22 – The news of what was happening in Antioch reached the Jerusalem church and “...**they sent out Barnabas...**” – If you remember, Barnabas was introduced to us before as a man who was generous (4:36-37) and the man who reached out to Saul of Tarsus after he was saved, when the rest of the church was afraid to do so (9:26-28.)

b. Verse 23 – “**When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord.**” – To have “...seen the grace of God...” is obviously referring to seeing the many who had received salvation by faith in His grace. Then Barnabas “**encouraged them...**” which was true of his name which is interpreted “**Son of Encouragement**” (Acts 4:36). It’s important to note what Barnabas encouraged them in. The Scripture states that he encouraged them to “...**with purpose of heart...continue with the Lord.**” – This tells us that it must be possible to not “**continue with the Lord**” after receiving Christ (cf. 13:43; 14:22). The Fire Bible asserts:

“**The NT believers did not assume that those who received God’s gifts of forgiveness, spiritual salvation and the baptism in the Holy Spirit would automatically remain true to the Lord. Temptations and worldly influences could still persuade new believers to turn from their faith and devotion to Christ.**”<sup>2</sup>

c. Verse 24 – **Character Traits of Barnabas Mentioned.** First, he was a “...**good man...**” which means he was “**upright, virtuous and of good character**”<sup>3</sup> This implies that he was a man who could be trusted to have integrity and to give wise and godly counsel. He was also “...**full of the Holy Spirit...**” which means he had received the Baptism in the Holy Spirit as they did on the day of Pentecost (2:1-4). Lastly, it states that he was “...**full of faith**” which suggests that he exemplified a man who had placed faith in the Lord Jesus Christ initially and who lived by faith in God and His Word (cf. Acts 6:3,5). The result of his ministry in Antioch was “...**a great many people were added to the Lord.**”

d. Verse 25 – “**Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul.**” – It is suggested by several expositors that the reason Barnabas went to find Saul was because he needed help in Antioch due to so many coming to Christ. Dr. Thomas Constable states:

“**As the church in Antioch continued to grow, Barnabas and perhaps others sensed the need for Saul's help. Consequently, at this time, Barnabas set out to track him down in ‘Tarsus,’ where Saul had gone (9:30). ‘Saul’ was an ideal choice for this work, since God had given him a special appointment to evangelize Gentiles (22:21).**

**Moreover, he had considerable experience in ministry already, probably about nine years of it since his conversion.**”<sup>4</sup>

d. Verse 26 – “**And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.**” – This shows the great importance of teaching new believers the Word of God. Evangelism is the first step but helping the believers grow spiritually by teaching them is vital for their continued strength to live for Christ. The Great Commission included making disciples by teaching them (Matthew 28:18-20).

<sup>1</sup>Stanley M. Horton, *Acts: A Logion Press Commentary* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2001), 214.

<sup>2</sup>*Fire Bible: English Standard Version*, Donald C. Stamps, Gen. Ed. (Springfield, MO: Life Publishers Int'l, 2011), 1834.

<sup>3</sup>Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*, (AMG Publishers; Revised edition, 1993)

<sup>4</sup>Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Acts* (<http://www.soniclight.com>: Sonic Light Publication, 2019), 252.

e. **Verse 26 (Continued)** – “**And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.**” – The designation “**Christian**” is often thought to be a derogatory term at first, given by unbelievers. Dr. Stanley Horton asserts:

“**Obviously, these Gentile believers could not be identified by a Jewish name, nor could they any longer be considered a sect of Judaism. They needed a new name. Soldiers in the Roman army often took the name of their general and added ‘ian’ (Lat. *iani*, Gk. *ianos*) to indicate they were a soldier and follower of that general...So the people of Antioch began to call the believers *Christiani* or ‘Christians’: soldiers, followers, partisans, of Christ. Some believe the name was first given in derision, but there is no great evidence of this. The believers did not reject the name. They were indeed in the Lord’s army, clothed with the full armor of God (see Eph. 6:11-18).”<sup>5</sup>**

### 3. Verses 27-30 – Sending Help to the Christians in Judea.

a. **Verse 27** – “**And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch.**” – This is the first time the ministry of the New Testament prophet is mentioned in the book of Acts. Prophets are mentioned several times in the New Testament (cf. **13:1; 15:32; 21:10; I Corinthians 12:28; 14:29–33; Ephesians 2:20; 4:11**). The ministry gift of prophet is one of the “**Five-Fold Ministries**” mentioned in **Ephesians 4:11**. Like the other ministries mentioned here, it is for the “**...equipping of the saints...**” which would include being a teacher of the Word of God and would be for the “**...edifying of the body of Christ.**” It is different than the “**gift of prophecy**” (**I Corinthians 14:1-3; 31, 39**). The ministry of the prophet includes speaking on behalf of God by the Spirit of God and sometimes, but not always, includes foretelling.

b. **Verse 28** – “**Then one of them, names Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar.**”

1) Agabus was a well-known prophet in the early church (cf. **Acts 21:10–11**). In this case, he was used of God to foretell a future event in order for the church to prepare. God didn’t give them instruction to intercede (pray) in order for the famine to be thwarted, but instead warned them ahead of time so they could be ready. Dr. Bob Utley writes:

“**great famine all over the world ... Claudius**” This geographical phrase refers to the Roman Empire (cf. **17:6, 31; 19:27; 24:5**). Claudius reigned from A.D. 41–54. He followed Caligula and preceded Nero. There were several severe famines during his reign (cf. Suetonius, *Life of Caludius* 18:2). The worst famine for Palestine was sometime between A.D. 44–48, according to Josephus, *Antiq.* 20.5.2.”<sup>6</sup>

c. **Verses 29-30** – Barnabas and Saul were entrusted to take the relief money to the elders in Jerusalem. The late Warren Wiersbe offers some very good insights regarding this:

“**An important spiritual principle is illustrated in this passage: if people have been a spiritual blessing to us, we should minister to them out of our material possessions. ‘Let him who is taught in the word share in all good things with him who teaches’ (Gal. 6:6, NKJ7V). The Jewish believers in Jerusalem had brought the Gospel to Antioch.**

**Then they had sent Barnabas to encourage the new believers. It was only right that the Gentiles in Antioch reciprocate and send material help to their Jewish brothers and sisters in Judea. Some years later, Paul would gather a similar offering from the Gentile churches and take it to the saints in Jerusalem (Acts 24:17; and see Rom. 15:23–28).”<sup>8</sup>**

<sup>5</sup>Horton, 217.

<sup>6</sup>Robert James Utley, *Luke the Historian: The Book of Acts*, vol. Volume 3B, Study Guide Commentary Series (Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International, 2003), 148.

<sup>7</sup>Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 450.