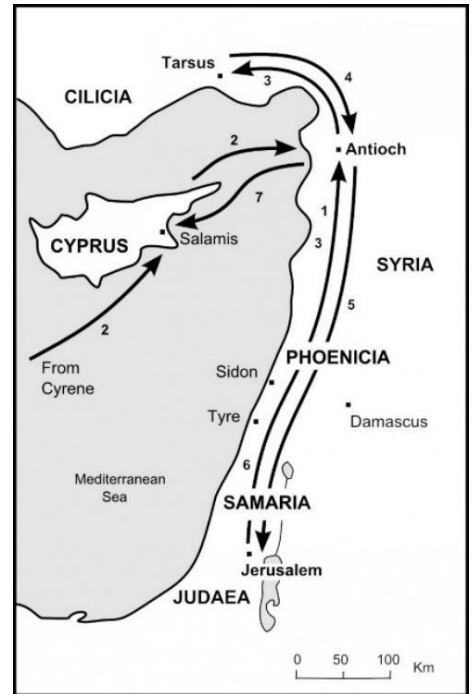


As God's people, we want to be guided by His Word and empowered by His Spirit to look more like Jesus. This Scripture Guide is based on this morning's passage to further equip you with what God's Word says.

Week 4 Acts 11:19-26

This section highlights how the first church was started outside of predominantly Jewish land. In Antioch, 400 miles from Jerusalem, the disciples preached the gospel to the first broadly Gentile audience. The church planted in Antioch¹ became a prototype of the Apostle's own church planting movement – evangelists spread the gospel, gathered believers, trained them, and sent them out to spread the gospel further. The church in Antioch would later become the mission hub for Paul and the church's expansion throughout the Roman empire.

Antioch was the third largest city in the empire (behind Rome and Alexandria) and was the capital of Roman-controlled Syria. Situated between the urbanized Mediterranean world and the eastern desert, it was the most cosmopolitan city in the region.² The city had developed an immoral and scandalous reputation associated with temple prostitution for the goddess Artemis and the god Apollo. In addition, Antioch had become a landing place for diaspora Jews. According to the ancient historian Josephus, more Jews lived in Antioch than in any other city outside Judea.



11:19-21 After Peter's vision and the Spirit filling the new Gentile believers, the narrative of Acts zooms out again to the broader church. The persecution that followed Stephen's death scattered the believers from Jerusalem. Three refugee sites were Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch in Syria. These disciples were not silenced by their persecutors in Jerusalem; they continued to share the gospel with their Jewish brethren. However, some of them who were natives of Cyprus and Cyrene were motivated to share with the Hellenist Gentiles (in this case, Greek-speaking non-Jews) in addition to the Jews. Like Stephen and the other Hellenistic Jews,³ these disciples were probably raised in Greek culture and yet devout Jewish believers and familiar with the Greek dialect and customs. This had a tremendous immediate impact as many pagan Gentiles believed the gospel and turned to the Lord (v. 21).

11:22-24 This was the first wide-scale evangelization of a cross-cultural Gentile population. It is possible that the disciples from Cyprus and Cyrene were native Greek-speaking and had an easier time preaching the gospel cross-culturally. When news of the surprising success of the gospel reached the church in Jerusalem, the leaders chose Barnabas as their emissary to Antioch (v. 22; see 3 on map).

Barnabas also was a Jew from a Greek-speaking region in Cyprus. He was a member of the church in Jerusalem and was known for his goodness and generosity (see Acts 4:26). When Barnabas arrives—true to his nickname⁴—he encourages all the believers in the infant church. Like Stephen (Acts 6:5), he is also

¹ Map provided by: <https://www.thebiblejourney.org/biblejourney1/7-journeys-of-jesus-followers/the-gentile-church-at-antioch/>

² Bruce, F.F., p. 224, *The Book of the Acts* (New International Commentary on the New Testament), Eerdmans, June 30, 1988

³ See Acts 6:5, where one of the appointed Hellenistic deacons, Nicolaus, is a native of Antioch who himself was a proselyte Jew.

⁴ Of Aramaic or Chaldee origin literally meaning "Son of Prophecy" or "Son of Rest". In Acts 4:36, it seems that the disciples nickname Joseph colloquially, Son of Encouragement.

said to be “full of the Holy Spirit and faith” (v. 24). Barnabas’s gifting was perfectly suited to minister to the newly established church and new believers. He is pleased to see God’s grace poured out on the Gentiles and encourages them. How did God’s grace become visible? John Piper answers, “...the good news about Jesus Christ came to Antioch because of persecution. Barnabas saw this and called it the grace of God, and it made him glad. God’s grace becomes visible when it makes the anguish of persecution a means of spreading the good news of Jesus.”⁵ Barnabas’ efforts and encouragement were instantly seen as “a great many” new believers were added to the church (v. 24).

11:25-26 Barnabas may have seen that the work needed in Antioch was too much for just himself. So, to find an old acquaintance (see Acts 9:27), he journeys to Tarsus (see 3 & 4 on the map) to find Saul. At this point, Saul (Paul) had been in Tarsus for about 14 years. Presumably, Barnabas had not seen him since he vouched for Saul to the Apostles in Jerusalem. Yet, he remembered Saul’s faith and zeal for the Lord and considered him a helpful companion in ministry. When they arrive back at the church in Antioch, they continue to teach and train the new believers for a whole year (v. 26).

The church’s growth in maturity and sheer numbers became known throughout the city. So much so that the nickname “Christian”⁶ became synonymous with all followers of Jesus of Nazareth. Bruce comments on the origins of the name Christian:

Christos, the Greek form of the title Messiah (“the anointed one”)—might be the name of an office to Greek-speaking Jews, but to the pagans of Antioch, it was simply the name of a man of whom these people were always talking... “oh these are the people who are always talking about Christos, the Christ people, the Christians...”⁷

Conclusion

From this point, Antioch is established as another “home base” for the growing church. Fast-forward to Acts chapter 13, we see that God uses the efforts of Barnabas, Saul, and the original Antioch evangelists to strengthen the church, to the point of sending out their own missionaries. The persecution in Jerusalem did not spell disaster for the church. Ultimately, God was using their situation and suffering to spread the gospel. The obedience of Barnabas and others to “see the grace of God” meant that the fruit and impact of the good news of Jesus would not end with them. The legacy of Antioch would become “missions” – a sending church.

⁵ <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/he-saw-the-grace-of-god-and-was-glad> see also <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/barnabas-the-goodness-of-great-faith>

⁶ Χριστιανός - khris-tee-an-os – The name was first given to the worshippers of Jesus by the Gentile followers of Christ. From the second century onward, it was accepted by them as a title of honor (Lipsius, C.L., Ueber Ursprung u. ältesten Gebrauch des Christennamens, 4to, p. 20, 1873). Initially this title seemed to be a term of derision. The only other two places in scripture that uses the word is in a negative sense—Paul on trial (Act 26:28), and believers suffering at the hands of the government (1Pe 4:16). Wuest says, “The word is used three times in the New Testament, and each time as a term of reproach or derision. Here in Antioch, the name Christianos was coined to distinguish the worshippers of the Christ from the Kaisarianos, the worshippers of Caesar.” (Wuest, K.S., p. 19., *Wuest’s Word Studies from the Greek New Testament for the English Reader*, Eerdmans, 1973)

⁷ Bruce, p. 228, *The Book of the Acts* (New International Commentary on the New Testament), Eerdmans, June 30, 1988