

Acts 11:19-30

The door has been opened to the Gentiles. Promises for them had been made from man's fall. God told Abraham, "In thee and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." Prophets had pointed forward to the day when in "him shall the Gentiles trust." Jesus promised Peter the keys of the kingdom and chose him to first preach the gospel to the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius (Mt. 16:19; Acts 15:9). He selected Saul to be apostle to them. All things were now in order for evangelism to begin the gentiles in earnest.

Acts 11:19 is a resumption of events digressed from in Acts 8. The persecution against the Jerusalem church scattered all disciples, except the apostles. The narrative tells of Philip's labors at Samaria and then of his preaching to the Ethiopian Eunuch, giving an explanation for the expansion of the work in Ethiopia. The events of Acts 11:19f tell how the gospel was spread abroad north and west as Philip's labors carried it east and south. "Go into all the world" were the Master's instructions and scattered disciples have gone in all directions. He also commanded "teach all nations"; "preach...to every creature" and at Antioch in Syria disciples begin to do that. At first those scattered disciples "spake the word to none save the Jews" but there certain men of Cyprus and Cyrene "spake unto the Gentiles also, preaching the Lord Jesus" (Acts 11:20).

The word which was preached in Antioch fell into fertile ground. "And the hand of the Lord was with them and a great number that believed turned to the Lord," equivalent to saying, "the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized," (Acts 11:22, 18:8). And so the church in Antioch begins, the first composed with a Gentile majority. This church was destined to wield a large influence for centuries to come. It became the center for evangelism among the Gentiles and, to her, Paul would return again and again to report the spread of the gospel among both Jews and Gentiles.

It did not take long for the conversion of large numbers of Gentiles to reach the ears of the Jerusalem church. Saul's persecution had caused the dispersion of that church but with the cessation of that, the work began to build again. Very likely some who had been dispersed returned and, by the time the Gentiles were converted in Antioch, a large congregation was meeting again in Jerusalem. Of course, not all who left Jerusalem returned and we read of congregations in various parts of Judaea, Samaria and Galilee.

News of the congregation in Antioch was of special interest to the Jerusalem church and so one was chosen to go and investigate and establish the disciples there. That one was Barnabas (Acts 11:22). The conversion of Cornelius had silenced momentarily the objection of Jewish Christians to preaching to the Gentiles (Acts 11:17f). The problems which Judazing teachers would raise would come later. Barnabas evidences no problems with accepting the uncircumcised, yet baptized, Gentiles in Antioch. To the contrary, "when he was come and had seen the grace of the Lord, was glad; and he exhorted them all that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord" (Acts 11:23).

Through Barnabas's labors at Antioch, many people were added to the Lord and either through his own perception or revelation from the Lord, he went forth to seek for Saul (Acts 11:25ff). Barnabas was aware of the circumstances of Saul's conversion and of God's purpose for him. At this point, Saul's work is little noticed by the historian. We know he had preached in Damascus and Jerusalem. He had been preaching in Tarsus for some time. Barnabas was aware that he might be there so he went seeking for him and found him, bringing him to Antioch where for a whole year the two of them taught much people. Here for the first time disciples are called "Christians." Three times this word appears in the scriptures, although some "translations" use it very often, reflecting upon their veracity as accurate translators. The other two instances where the word is found is Acts 26:28, 1 Peter 4:16.

There is dispute among scholars as to the origin of the word "Christian." Some are certain that the name was given in derision to disciples who accepted the name lest they seem to disclaim their confession of faith in Christ. On the other hand, some equally are certain that the name came as the fulfillment of prophecy. Isaiah had written, "and the nations shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory, and thou shalt be called by a new name which the mouth of Jehovah shall name" (Isa. 62:2). Whether Acts 11:26 is the fulfillment of Isaiah 62:2 may be disputed by some, but there are certain facts which cannot be disputed. The nations HAD SEEN the righteousness of God, kings HAD SEEN the glory of Zion, whether they agreed with its glory or not. The name "Christian" WAS a new name, never before named on disciples (although one of the great many blunders of Mormonism have people in America called "Christians" centuries before Jesus was born in Bethlehem!). Was the name give in derision?

God changed Abram's name to Abraham; Jacob's name to Israel. It was

common that God should name His people. If the name "Christian" is NOT of God's giving, what name is? Believe what you wish, as for me, I am persuaded it was God-given; God's name for His disciples: the name we are to glorify God in. Paul wished that all men be as he, a Christian. So do we.

Certain prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch to warn of a famine which would be over all the world in the days of Claudius (Acts 11:27f). One of these will later utter a significant prophecy to Paul (Acts 21:10-14). And so the disciples, each man, according to his ability, send relief to Judaeian brethren, choosing Paul and Barnabas as their messengers (Acts 11:9f). It is right and proper that churches with abundance sent to churches in need. It is right that churches use messengers to convey their gifts. It was right that these messengers carry funds to several churches for the sending brethren. Here is an example of how needy churches may be helped. The action was direct.

Those who received the funds to distribute for needy brethren were the elders. This is the first mention of elders, but will not be the last. How these men were chosen and what their functions were in these churches must be learned from other sources, which will be discussed as those passages occur in future studies.

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