

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION

Acts: The Continuing Earthly Ministry Of Our Lord Jesus Christ

Part VI: The Ministry Of The Universal Church In Its Spread To The Ends Of The Earth, Acts 8:26-28:31

B. Christ's Ministry To Build A Strong Base Of Outreach To The Ends Of The Earth

(Acts 11:19-30)

I. Introduction

- A. Christ's Acts 1:8 prediction that the Church would disciple the ends of the earth is a great challenge from a **human** view: the world is very diverse in languages and customs, leading to great discipling hurdles.
- B. Thus, as in Acts 11:19-30, Christ in His divine sovereignty and wisdom arranges for different believers to minister various ways to various groups to disciple efficiently, providing a great lesson for us (as follows):

II. Christ's Ministry To Build A Strong Base Of Outreach To The Ends Of The Earth, Acts 11:19-30.

- A. The Hebraistic Jews were so culturally distinct from the Grecian Jews who had adopted Grecian culture and language that this distinction became a point of strong contention in the Church in Acts 6:1.
- B. Knowing it would thus be hard for Hebraistic Jews to disciple non-Jews at the ends of the earth, Christ began with this Acts 6:1 cultural problem to prepare for a new **base of ministry operations** involving different kinds of people with gifts uniquely framed to disciple the nations (as follows):
 1. The Acts 6:1 problem led to appointing **Grecian Jews** like Stephen to oversee the situation, Acts 6:2-7.
 2. With Stephen coming to prominence, his witness before unsaved Hebraistic Jews led to his martyrdom, and a heavy persecution of Grecian Jewish Christians, Acts 6:8-15; 7:59-8:1.
 3. That persecution scattered mainly Grecian Jews from Jerusalem, leading to the spread of the Gospel to the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:1b, 26-40), Saul (Acts 9:1-31) and some Gentiles (Acts 9:32-10:48).
 4. Some of the Grecian Jews who scattered at Stephen's death traveled north to Antioch of Syria where they evangelized other Grecian Jews, Acts 11:19; F. F. Bruce, *Acts* (NICNT), 1980, p. 238.
 5. However, some of the Grecian Jews from Cyprus and Cyrene dared to begin discipling **Gentiles**, thinking the Gospel was applicable to uncircumcised Gentiles, Acts 11:20; *Ibid.*, p. 238-239.
 6. This move led to vast numbers of Gentiles coming to Christ, the first time a local church intentionally incorporated many Gentiles into its body as a systematic ministry practice, Acts 11:21.
 7. This unusual step in ministry gained the attention of the original Hebraistic believers in the Jerusalem Church, so they sent Barnabas up north to Antioch of Syria to investigate the matter, Acts 11:22.
 8. Barnabas was the perfect choice for this task. (a) He had the respect of the Hebraistic Jews as a Levite (Acts 4:36); (b) he was from Cyprus, and could relate well to those from Cyprus who had spearheaded this Gentile outreach, Acts 4:36; 11:20; (c) he was trusted and beloved for his benevolence to the Church though Levites were to be tithe recipients, Acts 4:36-37 and (d) he had comforted the Church in Jerusalem by introducing the newly saved Saul of Tarsus to a fearful Jerusalem Church, Acts 9:26-28.
 9. When Barnabas thus arrived in Antioch, he realized the Gentile Church was a work of God, and exhorted these believers to cleave to the Lord so that many more Gentiles were saved, Acts 11:23-24.
 10. This produced a large number of people in a church with limited Jewish Old Testament Scripture or New Testament era insight, so Barnabas retrieved Saul from Tarsus to use his vast training in Scripture and his ease in working with Jews and Gentiles to disciple the body at Antioch, Acts 11:25-26; 22:3.
 11. The Church advanced greatly by these steps so that, with the addition of prophets from Jerusalem, it sent Barnabas and Saul back to the Jerusalem Church with financial aid during a famine, 11:27-30.
 12. This Church at Antioch eventually became the sending Church of Paul and Barnabas, a strong base out of which they could disciple people groups throughout the Roman Empire, Acts 13:1-3 with 14:26-28.

Lesson: Due to the cultural orientation of the Hebraistic Jewish believers, God arranged for the rise of another sending base to reach the ends of the earth -- the Grecian Jewish and Gentile Church at Antioch, and He used Barnabas and Saul, men with qualifications uniquely needed for such a venture.

Application: May we heed the ways God has individually led us and stick with that leading in ministry versus trying to fit the mold of some other believer(s): He may want us to stick with one ethnic group (like Jerusalem's Hebraistic Jews), or He may want us to have a broader scope (like the Grecian Jews) or He may want us to focus on nurturing and organizing (like Barnabas) or instructing (like Saul)!