

ACTS: ALIGNING WITH GOD'S SOVEREIGN WORK OF DISCIPLING

XXVI. God's Building Of A Mission-Minded Church

(Acts 11:19-30)

I. Introduction

- A. The book of Acts explains "the orderly and sovereignly directed progress of the kingdom message from Jews to Gentiles, and from Jerusalem to Rome," Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament, p. 351.
- B. Accordingly, we can learn much about aligning our ministry efforts with God's sovereign work from studying the Early Church era as it is presented in the book of Acts.
- C. Acts 11:19-30 records how the Lord built the mission-minded Church of Antioch in Syria, that body becoming "the center of the early missionary activity" (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, fn. to Acts 11:19). It thus offers insight on what it takes to build missionary outreach in local churches, so we view it for our insight:

II. God's Building Of A Mission-Minded Church, Acts 11:19-30.

- A. The Church of Antioch of Syria was begun as a result of the divinely-permitted martyrdom of Stephen, for that event led believing Hebrews to scatter from Jerusalem, many of whom had come to Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost where all Hebrew men were to attend according to the Mosaic Law (cf. Deuteronomy 16:16) Thus, some of these Hebrew men returned to their home in Antioch of Syria, the third largest city in the Roman Empire, where there was a large Hebrew population, Acts 11:19a. (Ibid, p. 383)
- B. These Hebrews initially led only other Hebrews to Christ, Acts 11:19b. However, some Hebrews in Antioch from the Gentile Island of Cyprus and from Gentile Cyrene in North Africa (Ibid.), being familiar with and burdened for Gentile Greeks, crossed over from their Hebrew contacts to evangelize Greeks, Acts 11:20.
- C. God blessed this outreach, and a large number of Gentiles turned to the Lord at Antioch, Acts 11:21.
- D. News of this large spiritual harvest of Gentiles reached the Jerusalem church where the apostles still gathered (cf. Acts 8:1c), so they sent Barnabas up to Antioch to investigate this matter, Acts 11:22.
- E. When Barnabas arrived at Antioch and saw how God's grace had truly converted these Gentiles, he was glad and encouraged them all wholeheartedly to stay true to the Lord, Acts 11:23 NIV. Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit's control and who trusted in God, and many people were added to the Lord with Barnabas' evident confirmation and added contribution to the ministry, Acts 11:24.
- F. However, realizing his own ministry limitations as a typical Hebrew in ministering to Gentile converts, Barnabas left Antioch to find Saul whom the Church at Jerusalem had sent back to his hometown of Tarsus (Acts 11:25 with 9:30). This was a wise move, for Tarsus was on the border between eastern Oriental and western Greek cultures, Saul was schooled in Hebrew Old Testament theology at the foot of the great teacher Gamaliel, and he was a Roman citizen, a fact that would equip him with great outreach advantages. "No other man known to history from that time combined these qualities as did Paul of Tarsus [and] (i)t is difficult to imagine any other place [like Tarsus] whose whole atmosphere and history could have so effectively produced them in one person." (Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible., volume Five, p. 599, 602)
- G. When Barnabas had found Saul, he brought him back to Antioch of Syria where the two men for a whole year met with the church there and taught many people, Acts 11:26a. Consequently, the disciples were first called "Christians" in Antioch, identified as a religious group that was distinct from Judaism, Acts 11:26b.
- H. Due to this discipling of the Church of Antioch came maturity and a sense of duty to minister, Acts 11:27-30:
 1. Some believers who were gifted as prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch, and one named Agabus foretold that there would be a great famine, what occurred in the reign of Claudius Caesar, Acts 11:27-28.
 2. Since the believers in Jerusalem were often notoriously poor and sensing an obligation to minister to them from whom they had received the Gospel, the Hebrew and Gentile Church at Antioch decided to take up a collection and send it as famine relief to the believers in Judaea, Acts 11:29.
 3. In taking up this collection, they sent it to the elders in Judaea by way of Barnabas and Saul, Acts 11:30.

Lesson: *God used His permitted martyrdom of Stephen, the spiritual concern of Hebrews who were familiar with unsaved Greeks, and a divinely prepared, one-of-a-kind Saul of Tarsus to develop the mission-minded Church of Antioch of Syria. When godly Barnabas recognized the work of God there and his own limitations as a typical Hebrew, he aligned with God's evident working to bring Saul of Tarsus to Antioch to enrich its discipling process.*

Application: *(1) God Himself develops mission-minded churches, (2) but OUR part, seen in Barnabas' example, is (a) to realize God's work in others and (b) to do our part to further God's evident plan in the church's ministry.*