

The Book of Acts: Verse-by-Verse

Study Notes: Acts 11:22-25a

As Luke rounds out his account of the spread of the gospel to Gentile Antioch, we see a repeated pattern: The conversion of a group of people followed by representatives being sent by the apostolic leadership.

- **Sending Barnabas To Antioch: v. 22**

“News of this (meaning the Antiochian events) reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch.”

Antioch and Jerusalem were some 300 miles apart, but it didn't take long for the news of the Gentiles' reception of the gospel to reach the apostles.

The Repetition: In Acts 8, when “Samaria had accepted the word of God”, the apostles sent Peter and John to verify the report. Now the apostles send Barnabas to Antioch.

John Stott: “Luke seems to be hinting that they felt the need to assure themselves that all was well, in addition to helping nurture this young, multi-cultural church.”

There had been initial questions about whether God had granted the Samaritans or the Joppa Gentiles salvation. Some might now question the Greek Gentiles' conversion experience.

- **Why Barnabas?**

Barnabas had a significant history with the Jerusalem apostles. They knew him to be caring and benevolent. There is another reason they may have sent him:

Barnabas was a Cypriot Jew. Others like him had taken the gospel to the Antiochene Gentiles. Barnabas' vision for spreading the gospel would be in line with them.

- **Antioch On The Orontes:**

Antioch had a commercial and military importance to the Roman Empire. It also had an important role in both Judaism and the Early Church.

According to Josephus - Antioch was one of the important cities from which Jewish pilgrims made their way to Jerusalem for the annual festivals. Others came from Africa and Egypt in the south, Mesopotamia in the east, and from Anatolia and Syria.

Antioch was an important intersection for several roads that led from these areas to Jerusalem. In the first century, the Via Maris was the leading trade route between Jerusalem and modern-day Turkey and Syria.

Travelers might leave the Via Maris at various points to head south-east to Jerusalem. This would include Caesarea, or further south, Joppa. From there travelers could head east up through the Aijalon Valley, or via Ekron and the valley of Sorek into Jerusalem.

On his 300-mile trip from Jerusalem to Antioch, Barnabas would have simply reversed this route.

- **When Barnabas Arrived: v. 23**

“When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.”

“Barnabas saw what the grace of God had done.” The Greek word for “grace” here is “Charis” – or “Gift”. Alexander MacLaren:

“The grace of God here has very probably the specific meaning of the miracle-working gift of the Holy Spirit. That is rendered probable by the analogy of other instances recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, such as Peter’s experience at Caesarea, where all his hesitations and reluctance were swept away when ‘the Holy Ghost fell on them as on us at the beginning, and they spoke with tongues.’

Was Barnabas convinced Barnabas of the Antiochene believers’ conversion because they possessed the same visible and audible effects of that gift of God?

Albert Barnes: “[Barnabas] was glad ... and rejoiced that God had poured down his Spirit on them. The effect of a revival is to produce joy in the hearts of all those who love the Saviour.” – Albert Barnes

This does fit the pattern we have seen thus far in the accounts of the Jewish Pentecost, the Samaritans’ conversion, and the Gentile Pentecost at Joppa.

As such, MacLaren may well be right in suggesting that Barnabas saw the gifts of the Spirit in operation at Antioch and was therefore assured of the genuineness of the Antiochene conversions.

Now notice what else Luke says about this. Assured of the salvation unfolding at Antioch, Barnabas also saw that there was a great need to encourage them to remain true to Christ.

Let me give you another quote from Alexander MacLaren: “The sum of all objective Religion is Christ-the sum of all subjective Religion is cleaving to Him.” – Alexander MacLaren

Barnabas realized that these new Hellenistic Gentiles were going to need a lot of “stick-to-itiveness” in the days ahead. Now, remember, they had not been evangelized and taught by first order apostles. They had been saved a result of regular believers sharing the gospel with them.

He encouraged them to “remain true” to the Lord with all their hearts. That’s the goal, right? To remain true to Christ with all our hearts is such an important, yes, critical goal.

This phrase, “remain true” and its various forms is found throughout the Scriptures. Let’s take a brief tour of this important concept:

- Numbers 14:24 – “But because my servant Caleb has a different attitude and has remained loyal to me, I will bring him into the land which he explored, and his descendants will possess the land.”
- Acts 14:22 – “They preached the gospel in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the

faith. “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,” they said.

- 2 John 1:9 – “Anyone who does not remain in Christ's teaching but goes beyond it does not have God. The one who remains in that teaching, this one has both the Father and the Son.”
- 1 Peter 5:12 – “I've written this short letter to you and I'm sending it by Silvanus, whom I regard as a faithful brother. I've written to encourage you and to testify that this is God's genuine good will. Remain firmly established in it!”
- Revelation 2:13 – “I know where you live—where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, not even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city—where Satan lives.”

These verses really make MacLaren's statement seem so relevant –
 “The sum of all objective Religion is Christ-the sum of all subjective Religion is cleaving to Him.”

In verse 24, Luke has more to say about Barnabas' character. He tells us, “Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and strong in faith. And many people were brought to the Lord.”

Luke introduced Barnabas (Joseph) to us back in Acts 4:36-37, when he told us: “Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (meaning Son of Encouragement), sold a field he owned, brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.”

Now, he adds to that picture. Using language much like the description of the seven Greek men put in charge of the widows' feeding, Luke says Barnabas was “full of the Holy Spirit and strong in faith.”

As others have noted, Luke was notably impressed by Barnabas. But there is something more. Luke's phraseology ties together Barnabas' character and the results of his ministry at Antioch. Notice that Luke uses the conjunction “and” as he notes, “And many people were brought to the Lord.”

You can't see it in the English translations, but Luke is pointing back to Acts 2 and the early days of the Church at Jerusalem. In Acts 2:47 he records, "And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."

While the NIV translates Acts 11:24 as, "And many people were brought to the Lord", the English Standard Version correctly translates the Greek text as, "And a great many people were added to the Lord."

Luke is not only being consistent in his description of the salvation of the salvation experience at Jerusalem and Antioch, but also saying something by the uses of this same terminology: The great numbers of Greek-Gentiles being saved at Antioch is on part with the 3,000 Jewish conversion on the Day of Pentecost.

We might say it is a linguistic means of affirming that the Greek Gentiles' conversion was a genuine as the Jewish conversions.

Let's look at the first part of verse 25:

"Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch."

There is a real sense of success when it comes to the believers who had been dispersed from Jerusalem and went to Antioch. Again, these were not first-order apostles. They had not been in Jesus' inner-circle – yet they had been daring and forceful in sharing the gospel with these fellow Greeks.

Barnabas – who, likewise, was not a first-order apostle – is now having great success in both affirming those who have been saved and seeing those numbers grow.

Ah, but as with any ministry accessions, an issue arose. Barnabas soon discovered that he could not carry out such a large responsibility alone. He needed someone else who could both continue the Greek evangelism and disciple those who were being saved.

That's when Barnabas thought about Saul. He decided to pause his ministry at Antioch and go to Tarsus (Spain) to find Saul. The trip would take some 350 miles, so Barnabas would be gone for weeks – and then he had to locate Saul somewhere in the large city of Tarsus.

As we have seen, years before, Saul had been escorted to Caesarea Maritima by his friends in Jerusalem and put on board a ship bound for his native city. Barnabas had not had contact with him in a very long time, but he believed Saul would be the best man for the shared ministry at Antioch.

As John Stott suggests, this task was made harder by the fact that, "Saul appears to have been disinherited for his joining the followers of Jesus and could no longer be found at his ancestral home."

After what must have been an extended search, Barnabas finally found him. It's interesting how Luke words what happened next. He writes, "... and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch."

Do you see anything in that statement? I do. Barnabas, the leader of the new Greek-Gentile Church in Antioch, finds Saul and brings him to Antioch. Saul has not yet grown in ministry to the point that he could be described as the "Apostle to the Gentiles".

No, at this point Barnabas has the greater role – even beyond Peter's ventures. Barnabas is heading up the Church in a very large and prosperous Roman stronghold. He is preaching and teaching to the populace – and now Saul has become *his* co-worker.

- **Next Time: Barnabas and Saul's next assignment.**