

Valley Bible Church
Sermon Notes for March 9, 2014

The Ministry by the Church of Antioch to the Gentiles
Acts 11:19-26

This section of Acts begins the change in focus from Jerusalem toward an active ministry to the Gentile world.

There is a change in geography to Antioch, a city of over 500,000 people and the third largest city in the Roman Empire.

There is a change in biography to Barnabas and Saul (Paul, the apostle), whose leadership would bring the church in Antioch to become the home base for the future missionary journeys.

There is a change in chronology with the second half of Acts 11 covering several years.

1. The ministry of Greek Jews in Antioch (11:19-21)

Acts 11:19 points us back to the persecution of Acts 8:1 that led to the scattering of Greek Jews from Jerusalem. Through these believers, God's providence moved the word of the Lord to the Gentiles.

Antioch had a large Jewish population of over 50,000 who were the initial recipients of the gospel.

This is the first record of Jews intending to evangelize Gentiles. Their preaching of the "Lord Jesus" stands opposed to the Gentile view of Caesar as lord.

The "hand of the Lord" was used to speak of God's work in salvation in the Old Testament (Isaiah 59:1; 66:14) and the use of this phrase here shows Christ as equal to the God of the Old Testament.

2. The ministry of Barnabas in Antioch (11:22-24)

The large number of Gentiles coming to faith in Antioch produced a challenge to the unity of the church.

Barnabas was a Levite originally from Cyprus (Acts 4:36). He was chosen for the task by the church at Jerusalem because he had proved himself faithful in his godly encouraging service in Jerusalem and had earned their trust. Lesser men than Barnabas might not have rejoiced at the inclusion of the Gentiles into the church.

Ancient church writings reference Luke as being from Antioch, leading to the possibility that the author of Acts was one of these “considerable numbers.”

3. The ministry of Saul in Antioch (11:25-26)

Barnabas saw value in Saul’s evangelism in Jerusalem (Acts 9:27) and he saw value in Saul’s teaching in Antioch ten years later (cf. Galatians 1:18-2:1).

Each time the New Testament referred to “Christians” (cf. Acts 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16) it was a derisive term used by others. This designation differentiated the believers from the Jews, resulting in the loss of the protection that Rome gave to a legal religion.

The word “Christian” includes the Hebrew concept of Messiah, the Greek root word “Christ” and the Latin suffix “ian,” showing the universality of the message the believers proclaimed.

May we, as Christians, serve the Lord through uniting all people through faith in Christ, regardless of what others may say.