

>>>>>> Acts - Lesson 21 <<<<<<<

- 1) We finished last time discussing the Church at Antioch, how it was started and the differences in the Jews and Gentiles at this start.
- 2) We will pickup with the introductory remarks Luke makes and then continue to the reaction of the church in Jerusalem.

Acts 11:19–26 (NIV)

- 3) First, it would be good to know – why did the church in Jerusalem send Barnabas to Antioch?
- 4) Scripture really doesn't say – only they heard about the situation and sent Barnabas.
- 5) The LABC pretty much states the obvious:

Word of the happenings in Antioch prompted the leaders of the Jerusalem church to send someone to investigate.

- 6) Also, even with the Ethiopian Eunuch, Cornelius, and even the Samaritans, it appears that the perhaps the leaders “Jews of the circumcision” were not ready for the considerable number of Gentiles being added at Antioch.
- 7) Perhaps, their hope was that he would find something wrong so they could stop the Gentile growth.
- 8) Of course, Barnabas was a well-known figure in the Church at that time. Remember when we first learned about him:

Acts 4:36-37 (NASB 2020)

³⁶Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement), ³⁷owned a tract of land. So he sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

- 9) So, when Barnabas gets to Antioch, he finds nothing wrong, in fact, things are great.
 - a) He sees the work of the Holy Spirit there and he jumps right in and begins work.
- 10) The congregation grew and, one might assume, there were some difficulties.
 - a) As one might also expect, there was likely the typical “standoffishness” between the Gentile Christians and the Jewish Christians.
- 11) Not to mention the sheer number of new converts.
- 12) So, it appears that Barnabas feels that he needs some help.
- 13) So, let's go get an old friend who is really able to help with all this.
 - a) And who better for this job than Saul!
- 14) Of course, we recall that Saul had been sent away to Tarsus from Jerusalem in order to save his life.

Acts 9:26–30 (NASB 2020)

²⁶When he came to Jerusalem, he tried *repeatedly* to associate with the disciples;

and *yet* they were all afraid of him, as they did not believe that he was a disciple. ²⁷ But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus at Damascus. ²⁸ And he was with them, moving about freely in Jerusalem, speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord. ²⁹ And he was talking and arguing with the Hellenistic *Jews*; but they were attempting to put him to death. ³⁰ Now when the brothers learned *of it*, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus.

15) So, Barnabas sets off to fetch Saul to help him.

- a) Again, no phones, may not have even had an address.
- b) Not to mention the fact that Saul was traveling throughout the region teaching and planting churches during this time.
- c) Quite an undertaking on the part of Barnabas.

16) However, with success, Barnabas returns to Antioch with Saul and they spend the next year building the church there.

17) What a fantastic and exciting time it must have been for them.

18) John MacArthur brings out a point here that I think is really valid and important.

19) It tells us what was happening there in Antioch with Saul and Barnabas and what is *not* happening in many of our churches today.

These two gifted men formed a powerful ministry team. They faced the daunting task of shepherding a large number of new believers in a hostile pagan environment. Their solution was **for an entire year** to meet **with the church**, during which time **they taught considerable numbers**. Unlike many in today's church, they knew the **most urgent need** of those new Christians was to **be taught the Word of God**. In mass meetings of the Antioch believers, Barnabas and Saul did just that.⁷

Do you feel that our churches today are getting “Word” teaching?

Acts 11:27–30 (NIV)

- 1) Agabus was a prophet. We will meet him again in chapter 21:10 with another not so uplifting prophesy.
- 2) Historically, this famine is hard to pin down.

⁷ John F. MacArthur Jr., [Acts](#), vol. 1, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 315.

- 3) In fact, according to at least one source, the famine that he refers to here is really not just one great famine but a series of famines which occur between 41 and 54 C.E. during the reign of Claudius as scripture indicates.
- 4) I would like to bring something out here that speaks to a philosophy of scriptural study in general.
 - a) Many times, we will get into comments like this one which Luke makes.
 - b) Rather than spend a tremendous amount of time trying to figure out why he stated this as he did, we need to concentrate on the larger point that is being made.
- 5) In this case, the real point is not whether there is a single “severe famine over the entire Roman empire” or many famines over a longer period of time (same result).
 - a) In the end, we really don’t even care if the famine occurred or not.
- 6) The real point is what effect this prophesy had on the disciples in Antioch.
 - a) It brought about a spontaneous generosity that was exhibited in preparing a gift for the mother church in Jerusalem.
 - b) God’s lesson for us is not the history of the famine but the effect the prophesy had on the believers.
- 7) As we read and study scripture, we must be open to ways that allow us to hear God speak to us.
 - a) Again, it is the lessons we find that we can apply to our lives to become more pleasing to God – not the arguments we might get in about the minute details.
 - b) Now, that might seem a little odd coming from me since I am a detail guy.
 - c) However, what I want to say here that First, I try to keep a balance in detail and big picture meaning.
 - i) Second, is that the reason I delve into the details as much as I do is **not** to cause conflict or disagreement.
 - ii) Rather it is my hope that by sharing these details, the scripture will become more alive to us and we will enjoy studying it more.
 - iii) We must NEVER forget that behind all the events and coming and goings of what we read in God’s word were PEOPLE!
 - (1) People who had lives and hurts and wants and hunger and pain.
 - d) It is an effort to take us back many times to where these folks were and let us see what they are really dealing with every day.
 - e) “The Chosen” comments.
- 8) Next, we are back in Jerusalem and we find that things are starting to get a little dicey for the Christians.

Acts 12:1–5 (NIV)

- 1) This was King Herod Agrippa I, the son of Aristobulus and grandson of Herod the Great.
- 2) His sister was Herodias, who had been responsible for the death of John the Baptist.
- 3) Herod Agrippa I was partly Jewish.
 - a) The Romans had appointed him to rule over most of Palestine, including the territories of Galilee, Perea, Judea, and Samaria.
- 4) He began to persecute the Christians in order to please the Jewish leaders who opposed them, hoping to solidify his position.
- 5) Agrippa I is mentioned in the Bible only in this chapter. He died suddenly in A.D. 44. We will get to that shortly.
 - a) His death is also recorded by the historian Josephus.
Above comments from LABC - Bruce Barton et al., Life Application New Testament Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 2001), 513.
- 6) Bad stuff is happening! The Sons of Thunder are no more!
 - a) This must have had a tremendous impact on John. I can't imagine how he dealt with this.
- 7) As we look at this situation with Herod and Peter, perhaps we see that same hypocrisy creep in – just like when the chief priests and members of the council were dealing with Jesus.
 - a) Passover is here and we can't do anything to upset the people.
- 8) On the other hand, this may have been a strategic move on Herod's part.
 - a) Since it was Passover, more Jews were in the city than usual.
 - b) By arresting Peter and trying him immediately **after** the Passover, Herod could impress the most Jews and by waiting he is assured of not causing problems.
- 9) I personally think that his final intent with the trial was to convict Peter publicly and execute him as he had James.
- 10) Of course, he had enough knowledge of the miraculous events surrounding the apostles that he was going to assure (so he thought) that Peter did not escape – WRONG!

Acts 12:6–17 (NIV)

- 1) There are lots of interesting points in this event.
- 2) The first I think is Peter's attitude.
 - a) I cannot under any circumstances believe that he was not totally aware of what his fate was likely to be come the conclusion of the Passover.
 - b) He would be tried and killed just as James had been.
 - c) Yet, he is so soundly sleeping that the angel actually has to punch in his side to get him up.
 - d) Even then, he is still in that sleep state like we all get in occasionally where we have a dream and when we first wake up we think it was real.

- e) Peter is functioning but he still thinks he is dreaming.
 - f) Once he walks away down one of the streets and the angel leaves him he comes to that everything is real and indeed, he is now really free – but where to go?
- 3) The next interesting thing might be Rodah – in this almost comic like situation where she gets so excited she leaves Peter standing at the outer entrance.
- 4) Finally, there is the whole group. I must confess, I have to agree with N.T. Wright here.
- a) It gives us a little insight into the true nature of these early Christians.
 - b) They are all not super heroes – even though they were praying fervently for Peter’s release, when it happens, the last thing they do is believe that their prayers had been answered.
- 5) They don’t believe it.
- a) They think Rodah is crazy! Or,
 - b) They think Peter is already dead and this is his angel – that’s a big question all unto itself?
- 6) At any rate, once the mess settles down, Peter just delivers the message – he is out of here!!
- a) Don’t know where but gone – a definite indication that he knew that he would be killed if he stayed in Jerusalem.
 - b) One comment indicated that some, those who suppose that Peter was the first Pope, say he went to Rome.
 - c) This is highly unlikely since we see him back in Jerusalem shortly after Herod’s death.
 - d) We do know that this is really the last truly deep look we get at Peter in and his activities in Acts.
 - i) We see him again in chap 15 but really nothing more.

Acts 12:18–19 (NIV)

- 7) Not such a good outcome for the guards – sixteen men executed!
- 8) Turns out it is not going to end well for Herod either.

Acts 12:20–24 (NIV)

- 1) As horrible as this scene is, it is pretty straightforward.
- 2) However, having said that, here is one of those situations where, in translation, context must rule.
- 3) The word for god is θεος and regardless, it is not unique to God the Father.
- 4) So, when we look at this sentence, one has to consider the fact that the people are listening to Herod speak.
- 5) Therefore, there is no way that they could be thinking that it was God the Father and thus, we must translate the sentence ... a god not a man! and not ... God and not a man!.

- 6) The problem is that in Herod's mind they were praising him as a god and the issue is that he did not say that he wasn't.
- 7) The LABC comments here:

The reason for this judgment was that Herod accepted the people's worship instead of giving the glory to God. God knew what was going on in Herod's heart and refused to share his glory with any earthly potentate. Pride is a serious sin. God chose to punish Herod's pride immediately.⁸

Do we ever take the praise of others for ourselves when God is the one that should be receiving the praise?

⁸ Bruce Barton et al., [*Life Application New Testament Commentary*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 2001), 516.