

The Lord's Hand Was with Them

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Acts 11:1-30

After the sacred experience that Peter and Cornelius and his community had, we read in the Word that Peter stayed a few more days in Caesarea.

Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days. (Acts 11:48b)

I can only imagine how the new believers were coming together and rejoicing.

-When a group of us accepted Christ many years ago in a camp in Syria, we eventually went home to Aleppo City. Almost every night we came together in someone's house to sing songs and have prayer time. I can only imagine how Peter and Cornelius' community felt.

Then what?

Peter headed back to his city, Jerusalem.

The apostles and the believers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. ²So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him ³and said, "You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them." (Acts 11:1-3 NIV11)

What?

Please notice how Luke writes:

Did the apostles hear something good or bad?

Something good. There were new believers throughout Judea and especially Gentiles who had received the Word of God.

The apostles did not know what was going on. They did not know God visited Peter in his vision and gave him a message. The apostles needed to be transformed like Peter. They criticized Peter saying how dare he went to the house of Gentiles, uncircumcised men....

-Isn't it funny how they reacted to Peter; instead of understanding what happened, they judged him... "How dare you enter a Gentile's house...?"

Do we do the same thing. Yes, oh yes....

What did Peter do?

I personally would retaliate, but not Peter. Peter is changed. The "old" Peter would have retaliated. What did Peter do?

Starting from the beginning, Peter told them the whole story: (Acts 11:4)

You know, he learned from the best teacher, Jesus. Jesus spoke with stories, parables. A great way to teach...

Peter told exactly how God worked in his life, the vision, the clean and unclean animals, the delegation that came, going with the delegation, Cornelius' experience... (Acts 11:5-14)

¹⁵“As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. ¹⁶Then I remembered what the Lord had said: ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ ¹⁷So if God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God’s way?”

¹⁸When they heard this, they had no further objections (they fell silent) and praised God, saying, “So then, even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life.” (Acts 11:15-18 NIV11)

Holy Spirit came on them...

This is the second Pentecost... if the first one in Jerusalem targeted the **Jews**, this targeted the **Gentiles**.

-Thank you, Jesus, that you died and offered salvation **for anyone**... all races and nations.

Peter did not convince them; **it was the Spirit doing the ministry**. The Word of God says, **“But here they are silent.”** Yes, sometimes the Spirit of God will teach us to be silent and give glory to God. People (Gentiles) are repenting, what else we can ask... right... People are repenting... we should rejoice.

The Lord’s Hand was with them:

Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. ²⁰Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. ²¹The Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord. (Acts 11:19-21 NIV11)

Here we go, nothing can stop the Spirit of the Lord from spreading. Here we find people who were scattered beyond outside Jerusalem and borders of Judea to different locations; those were persecuted when **deacon Stephen** was stoned to death.

Let me show you on the map where did they go. Lebanon (Phoenicia), Cyprus (the island). The mission was towards the Jews.

-Some from **Cyrene** (Libya) and **Cyprus** went to **Antioch** (Turkey now) (it used to be in Syria until 1939).

“Antioch of Syria was founded about 300 B.C. by Seleucus I Nicator, who named it after either his father or his son, both of whom bore the name Antiochus”.¹

“Antioch in North Syria by the Orontes River was the largest of sixteen cities in the eastern Mediterranean bearing that name. ... Antioch in Syria was the third largest city in the Roman empire, surpassed in population only by Rome and Alexandria.”²

-There was a large population of Jews, Syrian, Romans...The Mission was towards Greek society. We see the spreading the WORD of God that Jesus Christ is LORD. They have new eyes to see how God’s Spirit works...

Imagine with me the Jewish converts of Cyrene (They were in the first Pentecost Acts chapter 2) now are missionaries to non-Jewish people. Antioch is full of temples, shrines for Greek gods. In this city the message was spread that Jesus is LORD. Halleluiah...

The expression “**The Lord’s hand was with them.**” This was frequently used in the OT, which describe that **Yahweh is with the Israelites** against the enemies. God’s power is in this city. His power over gentiles...interesting...

Barnabas in Antioch

News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. 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.** ²⁴ **(for) He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.** (Acts 11:22-24 NIV11)

Jerusalem is wondering what is going on, news travel fast... the apostles would like to check and see if the evangelism is rooted on Christ.

- Interesting, they send Barnabas, not Peter, not John.

- Barnabas’ name appeared until now in chapter 4 when he sold his property and gave it to the disciples, and in chapter 9 when he was the one who introduced Saul-Paul to the apostles. This man has special gifts, the gift of mercy and compassion, and gift of building bridges...

- Ajith Fernando says: “They made a wise choice in Barnabas, for he had distinguished himself as an encourager (4:36) and was known for his godliness

(11:24). Moreover, he was a Jew from Cyprus, like some of those who had preached to Gentiles in Antioch. He would have a broader perspective than those who had never been abroad. It may be that he volunteered his services for this assignment.³

- He saw what the Grace of God has done.... Amen and amen....it is all work of the Grace of God... I think we should be silent and thank God in our hearts....

- He was glad and **encouraged** them to **remain faithful** to the LORD.

- Then we see Luke saying something about Barnabas, "**a good man.**" What does it mean, a **man full of Holy Spirit**.

Result, more people accepted Christ.

- I pray that we learn from Barnabas, to be encouragers... to build bridges... he had compassion and understanding.

Then what?

-Barnabas and Saul-Paul in Antioch

²⁵ Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, ²⁶ and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch. (Acts 11:25-26 NIV11)

Why in the world is he going to Tarsus, not too far from Antioch?

He is searching for Saul. Why?

Barnabas wanted to have someone he knows and a gifted preacher, **Saul of Tarsus**.

Barnabas goes to Tarsus to find Saul-Paul. I assume he knows how Saul thinks and where his vision is. God is orchestrating a very important mission trip. Remember who was Barnabas, man with full of God's Spirit. William Barclay says about **Barnabas**: "*the man with the biggest heart in the church.*"

Several years had passed since Saul had left **Jerusalem**, and Christian brothers had escorted him to **Caesarea**, and then sent him by ship to his hometown of **Tarsus**.

- Can you think what Saul-Paul was doing in his hometown? He was isolated...

The Bible does not tell us what Paul was doing in his hometown. Oh, I am sure he was preaching, from his family to the synagogue to anyone... (this is my speculation)

- Barnabas finds Saul-Paul and brings him to Antioch. Imagine **this duo preachers** together serving the Lord in Antioch. We read that the ministry was booming.

Guess what, first time congregation of believers called Christian was in Syria and not Jerusalem. **“The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.”**

-By the way, **Luke is from Antioch.** Some commentators think he accepted Christ in those days when people came from Cyprus and Cyrene. So for Luke this city has a special place in his heart.

-There is a Need

²⁷ During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. ²⁸ One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) ²⁹ The disciples, as each one was able, decided to provide help for the brothers and sisters living in Judea. ³⁰ This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul. (Acts 11:27-30 NIV11)

My last point here is that we find there was group of prophets came from Jerusalem and one of them prophesied that there will be a severe famine in the Roman Empire. and there was need in Jerusalem. Everyone got involved in the “Greek” society and raised money and send it with Saul and Barnabas.

It touches me this action from Antioch to Jerusalem. Antioch is a new church established by scattered unnamed Christians, most likely they heard how Jewish-Christians in Jerusalem, how they felt about Gentile-Christians. The reality shows when God’s Spirit works in churches, secondary issues we put aside and focus how the body of Christ builds.

N. T. Wright says about these verses:

“The first ‘Christians’ were not just known as ‘the king’s people’. They were known as people who, precisely because that ‘king’ was Jesus himself, were committed at the deepest level to giving themselves in love to one another and to all in need.”⁴

Conclusion

1. Pray that you will be filled with God’s Spirit. Any other thing that replaces God’s Spirit is destructive.

2. Think about others. Others are important. **Be an encourager...**What can I do for them, how can I build bridges with them.....

R.C. Sproul says: “That is what it means to be a Christian. It means to encourage. It means to reach out to the lost, and it means to give, to relieve the pain and suffering of our brothers and sisters locally, internationally, and internationally.

That is how the connection was made between Antioch and Jerusalem, and it formed the foundation for the great missionary outreach of Paul and Barnabas.”⁵

3. Support our church mission projects. In prayer, giving and volunteering.
4. VBS is missional ministry in our church. Every year more than 60 kids attend. We need your help. Please get involved in it.
5. Build bridges... value relationships over rules.

1. It was situated on the Orontes River about three hundred miles north of Jerusalem and twenty miles east of the Mediterranean, at the joining of the Lebanon and Taurus mountain ranges where the Orontes breaks through and flows down to the sea.”Richard N. Longenecker, *Acts* (EBC 9; ed. Frank E. Gaebelin and J. D. Douglas; Accordance electronic ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984)

2 It was also the seat of administration of the Roman province of Syria. A large Jewish population lived there, estimates of which range from 22,000 to 65,000. From Ajith Fernando, *The NIV Application Commentary, Acts* P 349

3. Bruce, *Acts*, NICNT, 226, citing M. Hengel, *Acts and the History of Earliest Christianity*, trans. J. Bowden (London: SCM, 1979), 101–2. From Ajith Fernando, *The NIV Application Commentary, Acts* P 350

4. N.T. Wright *Acts for Everyone (book1)*, P 180

5. R.C. Sproul, *You Will Be My Witnesses to the End of The Earth*, P 158

“Those who live godly lives will encourage others to be godly.” Barnabas’ quality by Ajith Fernando

- Be patient with people’s quirks.
- Help anyone around you who is hurting.
- Give people a second chance.
- Do good to those who hurt you.
- Be kind to those who offend you.
- Build bridges of love to the unpopular.
- Value relationships over rules. (Rick Warren) (May 17, 2023)

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Eph 4:1-6NIV11)

I’d rather have Jesus than silver or gold
I’d rather be His than have riches untold
I’d rather have Jesus than houses or lands
I’d rather led by His nail-pierced hand.

Than to be the king of a vast domain
Or be held in sin’s dread sway;
I’d rather have Jesus than anything
This world affords today.

I’d rather have Jesus than men’s applause
I’d rather be faithful to His dear cause
I’d rather have Jesus than world-wide fame
I’d rather be true to His holy Name.