

REFLECTION GUIDE

ACTS 11:19-30 | WHEN THE CHURCH IS AT ITS BEST

KEY TERMS

Antioch - 300 miles from Jerusalem, Antioch was the 3rd largest city in the Roman Empire with a population of 500,000 people. Antioch would serve as a “home base” for Paul (see Acts 13:1-3, 15:30-26 & 18:22-23).

Hellenists - This term has a wide range of meaning and Luke used it previously in Acts to refer to Greek speaking Jewish Christians (6:1) and Greek speaking Jewish non-Christians (9:29). The context in 11:20 seems to suggest that these *Hellenists* are Gentiles for several reasons: 1) these regions are predominately inhabited by Gentiles, 2) there’s a contrast between verse 19 (*speaking the word to no one except Jews*) and verse 20 (*but there were some of them who...spoke to the Hellenists also*), and the larger storyline focus on Gentiles turning to faith in Jesus (v. 18).

DID YOU KNOW?

The word *Christian* or *Christians* is used only three times in the Bible (Acts 11:26, 26:28, & 1 Peter 4:16). Terms such as *disciples*, *saints*, *brothers*, and *believers* are far more commonly used to refer to followers of Jesus.

Christians - The title *Christians* suggests “those belonging to or identified with Christ.” It’s likely that the inclusion of Gentiles in the Church led to this new title because no longer was the Church simply a sect within Judaism; it was a new people made up of Jews and Gentiles who all followed Jesus.

BACKGROUND

After following the thread of Paul’s conversion (Acts 9:1-31) and God bringing Gentiles into his Church through Peter (9:32-11:18), Luke returns to those in the Church *who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen* (v. 19; see Acts 8:1). Luke tells his readers that this group has now travelled to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch *speaking the word*, initially to Jews only, but then also to Gentiles (vv. 19-20). The result is that many people *turned to the Lord* and the Church continues to grow both by the faithful witness of the apostles (Peter and Paul), but also by ordinary, everyday Christians. Similarly to when Samaritans began believing the gospel (8:14), Barnabas goes to see what has taken place and Luke says *he was glad* (v. 23). Barnabas then takes the opportunity of being in Antioch to travel to Tarsus and find Saul in order to bring him to Antioch where they stayed *a whole year...and taught a great many people* (v. 26). Here in Antioch, this prominent Roman city, the people of God, made up of Jews and Gentiles, are first called Christians (v. 26). Chapter 11 ends with mention of a prophet named Agabus coming from Jerusalem to Antioch to foretell about a famine that was coming in Judea, and the Church in Antioch sends support to Jerusalem with Barnabas and Saul.

GOING DEEPER

Read Matthew 5:13-18, Matthew 28:18-20, Romans 10:14-15, & 2 Corinthians 5:17-20. Who do these verses apply to? What do they teach about how Christians should live in the world? How do they encourage or challenge you personally?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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LEARNING THE WORD

1. Read Acts 11:19-30 and make observations about the development of this church. Identify 4-6 stages of growth and name each one with a word or phrase.
2. Verse 23 says that Barnabas “came and saw the grace of God”. How do you “see grace”? In other words, what would signs of the grace of God look like in new believers?
3. Verses 22-26 tell us about Barnabas. Why was he sent to Antioch? What was he like? What stands out about his ministry?
4. Why do you think believers were first called “Christians” at this time in Antioch? What happened in this community that caused outsiders to recognize them as an entirely new community called Christians?

LIVING THE WORD

5. Why is financial generosity an obvious sign of health and vitality in a maturing believer?
6. The Greek word for encouragement is “para-kaleo” which literally means “to call alongside.” How have you experienced this in a powerful way? Why does a healthy church need to be full of “Barnabases”?
7. Is there some way that you need encouragement from others right now? What is one way that you can give encouragement right now?
8. As you consider this lesson, what is one thing that stands out to you about the role you have to play in helping a church to thrive?