

CGYG & LIFE Bible Study - Acts
Acts 11:19 – 12:25

Read Acts 11:19-30

-For review: Who was Stephen, and what were some of the effects of his death and the persecution that followed (v.19-21; see also Acts 8:1-5)?

- Stephen was one of the seven charged with distributing food to widows among the Grecian Jews; 1st martyr of the Church
- manner of his death and his prayer for forgiveness of his murderers probably had significant impact on Saul
- persecution after his death led to spread of the Gospel through Judea and Samaria
- in Acts 11, reaches as far as Phoenicia (modern day Lebanon), Cyprus, and Antioch (in modern day Syria)
 - great numbers of people believed and turned to the Lord
 - Antioch will later become centre for world evangelization – thus, far-reaching effects of Stephen's death

-Who was Barnabas, and why might the Jerusalem church have sent him (instead of one of the apostles) to see what was happening at Antioch? (cf. Acts 4:36-37)

- a Jew (Levite) from Cyprus – possibly a “Grecian” or “Hellenized” Jew
 - ?a natural connection with the large number of Grecian Jews converted at Antioch

-What qualities does Barnabas show in this passage, and what are some ways we can emulate these today?

- a good man, full of faith and the Holy Spirit
 - an encourager (cf. Acts 4:36) – his name means ‘Son of Encouragement’
 - loved the Lord; desired to serve Him and advance His work
 - not jealous of what was happening at Antioch, but was glad to see genuine evidence of God’s grace
 - instead of criticizing the work, encouraged them to remain faithful to the Lord
 - did not try to take or keep control of the work to himself, but went to look for Saul for help
 - recognized his own limitations – thus went to look for Saul to help teach and encourage the work
 - wisdom and discernment – understood the need and recognized Saul’s abilities to match the need
- v.24 suggests a great number of people were brought to the Lord because of Barnabas

-How did the ‘Christians’ at Antioch respond to Agabus’ prophecy?

- side note: believers first called “Christians” at Antioch – a nickname, likely with derisive overtones
- took up an offering to send to them

-What principles can we learn from their response about helping the needy within the Church, and how can we apply these principles today?

- gift should be given freely and willingly, not out of compulsion
- give according to ability
- accountability – gift sent with 2 messengers
 - could keep each other accountable, and also report where the money went
- fellowship – the church could have just given the money to the prophets to take when they returned to Jerusalem, but chose to send it with Saul & Barnabas instead
 - would deepen bonds of fellowship between the 2 churches
 - Saul & Barnabas could then return with report of how things were going in the Jerusalem church

Side note: Saul & Barnabas’ trip in v.30 likely same trip described by Paul in Galatians 2:1-10

Read Acts 12:1-25

Notes: The 'Herod' referred to in these verses is Herod Agrippa I, grandson of Herod the Great (who tried to kill Jesus). While it was normally thought adequate to chain one soldier to a prisoner, Peter was placed under "maximum security", with 2 soldiers chained to him and 2 guarding outside his cell.

-Why was Herod persecuting the Church?

-most likely to gain favor with the Jewish leaders (v.3)

-What do these verses teach us about prayer, and about how we should pray? (you might want to consider this passage in light of other verses about prayer, such as 2 Cor. 1:8-11; Eph 6:18; James 1:5-8, 5:13-16; 2 Cor. 12:7-9)

-prayer is powerful - the point seems to be that God sent His angel to bring Peter out of prison in response to prayer

-i.e. God answers prayer

-pray earnestly (v.5) and constantly – many gathered to pray into the night (v.12)

-the church "was earnestly praying..." i.e. ongoing prayer

-pray in faith that God will answer

-ironic that believers did not believe Herod, even though they had been praying (presumably for Peter's release)

-pray in faith that God will answer, but understanding that in His sovereignty may not grant what we ask for

-James was executed, even though the church had presumably been praying for him as well

-pray together (v.12 – many gathered together to pray) – as well as alone (cf. Matt 6:6)

-What comfort and encouragement does today's passage give to Christians facing hardships and persecutions?

-God is still in control of all circumstances, even in the face of persecution

-may allow for trials and persecution for a season, but will not allow His people to be destroyed

-chapter begins with Herod persecuting the church, but ends with his destruction and the spread of the word of God

-God is more powerful than man

-can easily overrule man's plans (e.g. Peter's escape from 'maximum security')

-Herod's (or anyone else's) plans come to a miserable end in the twinkling of an eye

-thus, should give God the glory due Him, rather than trying to usurp it for self

-evildoers will ultimately be swept away (e.g. Psalm 37)

-God's word will continue to grow and spread in spite of (or in many cases through) persecution (11:19-21, 12:24)

-examples of persecution related to Stephen, and Herod persecution of the Jerusalem church

-God answers prayer and works in response to it, so keep on praying!

Reflection and Application

Today's passage reminds us of two related truths; first, that Jesus Christ will build His Church and the gates of Hades will not overcome it (Matt. 16:18), and second, that in all things God works for the good of those who love and Him and have been called according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28). Because Christ Himself is the one who builds the Church, neither the death of men such as Stephen (8:1) and James (12:2) nor the imprisonment of Peter could destroy the Church; and neither Herod nor the Jews could stop the spread of His good news. Quite the contrary, Stephen's death and the persecution that followed resulted in the spread of the Gospel throughout Judea and Samaria, and, in the work at Antioch (11:19), would plant the seeds for the evangelization of the whole known world of the day (Acts 13:1-3). And though Herod persecuted the Church with all his earthly power, his schemes drove the Church to earnest prayer to which God responded in divine power. In the end, Herod "was eaten by worms and died" (12:23), while the word of God "continued to increase and spread" (12:24).

Spend time praising God for His sovereignty through times of trial. Remember your brothers and sisters around the world who are facing persecution for the sake of Christ, and pray earnestly for them and for their persecutors.