

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study guide is to facilitate the study of Acts 11:19-30 as a supplement to the sermon. It is based on my (Michael's) study and meditation on the passage. This handout can be used for personal study or community group conversation. (I hope you join a group!)

ACTS 11:19-30 ESV

19 Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. 20 But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. 21 And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. 22 The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. 23 When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, 24 for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. 25 So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, 26 and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians. 27 Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius). 29 So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. 30 And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

STRUCTURE

- I. **Stephen's persecution sends unnamed evangelists north, even to Gentiles (11:19-21)**
 - a. Stephen's persecution sends unnamed evangelists northward from Jerusalem (11:19-20)
 - i. Some spoke only to Jews (11:19)
 - ii. Others spoke even to Gentiles (11:20)
 - b. The Lord Jesus saved many Gentiles (11:21)
- II. **Jerusalem sends Barnabas to support the Gentile mission (11:22-24)**
 - a. Jerusalem hears and sends Barnabas to Antioch (11:22)
 - b. Barnabas hears and eagerly encourages the Gentiles (11:23-24a)
 - c. More people are added to the Lord Jesus (11:24b)
- III. **Barnabas recruits Saul from Tarsus to help in Antioch (11:25-26)**
 - a. Barnabas recruits Saul from Tarsus (11:25-26a)
 - b. Saul and Barnabas teach the new "Christians" for a whole year (11:26b)
- IV. **Jerusalem and Antioch exchange resources (11:27-30)**
 - a. Jerusalem sends prophets to Antioch, and a famine is predicted (11:27-28)
 - b. Antioch sends funds to Judea, and the famine is survived (11:29-30)

GENERAL COMMENTARY:

In the prior context, God swings wide the gate of salvation to Gentiles; here, they coalesce into the first Gentile church. The church in Antioch becomes not only the first Gentile church but also the first multiethnic church and headquarters for further Gentile missions. The blessing in Antioch would have been handicapped, however, if Peter had not persuaded his friends about God's work among Gentiles in the prior chapter.

The story begins with the mention of Stephen, who has been absent since his martyrdom in 7:59. Despite the tragic loss, his influence lived on. First, he prayed for his enemies to be forgiven, which led to Saul's salvation, and Saul figures prominently in this passage. Second, the persecution that erupted after his martyrdom catapulted missionaries into Judea and Samaria (8:1), ultimately reaching even Gentile lands (11:19-21).

One prominent theme that arises early on is the sovereignty of King Jesus. Enemies could not stop Him; they only advanced His mission. Friends advanced His mission also, but only because "the hand of the Lord"—the Lord

Jesus—blessed their efforts. Seated at the right hand of God, King Jesus ensures the reception of His gospel through both friends and adversaries.

The first Gentile church appears at first to be an accident, as unnamed evangelists flee Jerusalem, preaching the gospel wherever they go. Even if Jerusalem had not planned this venture, however, Jesus no doubt orchestrated it. Jerusalem's indirect role in planting the church emphasizes the direct "hand of the Lord" in its success. People didn't plant the church; Jesus did. As our Lord told His disciples, "Upon this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." The anonymity of the disciples only magnifies the sovereignty of Jesus in saving the lost and adding them to His body.

Another central theme of this section is that of travel. First, evangelists travel to the far north; second, Barnabas travels to Antioch; third, Barnabas travels to recruit Saul, who then travels back to Antioch with him; fourth, prophets travel down to Jerusalem; fifth, Saul and Barnabas travel with an offering from Antioch to Jerusalem. The theme of travel highlights two crucial characteristics of healthy church life: mission and unity.

Missionaries travel. Sometimes, they travel due to circumstances that force them like these unnamed evangelists. Whether it owes to persecution or a simple career change, Jesus sovereignly orchestrates every relocation to deploy us in His global mission.

At other times, we travel not "due to circumstances" but intention. Saul and Barnabas relocate to Antioch for a whole year to support the mission. Prophets travel to support the local church in Antioch, one of several "short-term mission trips" in Acts (see 8:9-25; 9:32-43; etc.). Later, Saul and Barnabas will travel for financial relief to the Jews—a precursor to bringing spiritual relief to Gentiles around the Mediterranean. The church is called to missions, which means we must travel. Some will travel on short-term missions and some on long-term ones; some will travel due to circumstances and some due to intentional relocation for the sake of mission. Whatever the reason, Jesus orchestrates His church to travel. Missionaries cannot be stationary.

The other characteristic of healthy church ministry, highlighted by the theme of traveling, is church unity. Jerusalem sends Barnabas to support the Gentile church. They send prophets to minister to the Gentile church. Having been around the longest, Jerusalem had what Antioch lacked: mature Christians. Rather than hoarding this resource, they sent them out.

Antioch did not have many mature Christians, but they did have money. Antioch was the third largest city in the Roman Empire, boasting a population of over half a million. Commerce thrived. When a famine enveloped the entire Roman world, Antioch's economy suffered less. Jerusalem shared what they had (people), and Antioch shared what they had (money). In this way, the global church cooperates, supporting one another despite our different ethnicities and resources.

VERSE-BY-VERSE COMMENTARY:

19 Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. 20 But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus.

—"those who were scattered... persecution... Stephen... traveled":

- In 8:1, a persecution arose in the wake of Stephen's death, and "those who were scattered went about preaching the word" (8:4). Philip is listed among those "scattered," and the subsequent story portrays him preaching to Samaritans and an Ethiopian. Most of these preachers, however, remain unnamed.
- God always raises up leaders like Peter, Saul, and Barnabas, but Luke wants us to know that the "no name" evangelists serve just as important of a role. The church turned the world upside down because no-namers preached the gospel wherever they went. We don't need famous Christians but rather Christians living for the fame of King Jesus.
- Luke wants us to know, after four chapters of narrative (from Acts 7 to 11), Stephen's influence is still being felt. Sometimes our greatest impact comes after we're gone.
- Schreiner: "By linking it [the Antioch mission] to Stephen's death, Luke also indicates the mission is related to the Jerusalem church but neither by plan nor permission. It is God's enterprise."

- Schreiner, quoting Tertullian: "The Christian's blood is the seed out of which Christians grow. And in Christians' blood the devil must be drowned."
- Some have suggested that the early church "needed" persecution to spur them to evangelize. That's not what this verse is about. Instead, this verse shows that not even persecution could shut the church up. Wherever they went, the Word went.
- "traveled":
 - There's a lot of travel going on in this chapter. Some traveled "as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch." These came from Jerusalem, where the persecution erupted. Others came to Antioch from Cyprus (an island in the Mediterranean) and Cyrene (North Africa). Later, Jerusalem sends Barnabas to Antioch, who then travels to Tarsus (eight days' journey) to recruit Paul. Later, Jerusalem sends prophets to Antioch, and Antioch sends funds to Jerusalem.
 - Why does Luke so emphasize travel in this section?
 - He wants us to see how Jerusalem and Antioch relate as sister churches, despite their different cultural flavors and backgrounds. In the wake of Acts 10-11, where Gentiles are welcomed, Jerusalem treats Gentiles in Antioch as though they are co-heirs of the same promises.
 - He wants us to see how both Jerusalem and Antioch serve one another in unique ways. Jerusalem provides people; Antioch provides money. Every church possesses God-given strengths that are meant for the benefit of the whole body of Christ, not just one mega-congregation.
 - He wants us to perceive the apostolic calling of the church. We can't proclaim the gospel to the nations without ever leaving home.
- "as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch":
 - Persecution expelled the word of God further out. God uses every circumstance for His glory.
 - Phoenicia was about 150 miles from Jerusalem; Cyprus was about 250 miles away; Antioch was about 400 miles away. A trip from Jerusalem to Antioch would be like traveling from OKC to Austin via camel.
 - "Antioch": this was the third largest city in the Roman Empire, populated by at least 500,000 people. Church tradition indicates that Luke hailed from this city. It was multicultural. The church leadership would be multicultural also (13:1).
- "speaking the word to no one except Jews... some of them spoke to Hellenists also":
 - In Acts 6:1, translators often render the Greek word for "Hellenists" as "Hellenistic Jews" (NIV, CSB, NASB). Since that story took place in Jerusalem, the word "Hellenists" is typically understood to refer to Greek-speaking Jews who had assimilated into Greek culture (to the chagrin of "Hebraic Jews" who viewed them as compromisers.)
 - Here, however, there is a debate over whether "Hellenists" refers to Greek-speaking Jews... or just Greeks. It is argued that since the "Jews" (11:19) contrast with the "Hellenists" (11:20), the word must refer to Greeks and not just Greek-speaking Jews. Further supporting this argument is that the story occurs on the heels of Acts 10-11, where God opens the door to Gentiles. Finally, it would not have been remarkable that people preached to Hellenists if they were merely Greek-speaking Jews. We already have a story about this in Acts 6. It seems, instead, that Luke aims to advance the storyline about God's mission to the Gentiles by showing how He reached Gentiles in Antioch.
 - I'm convinced by these arguments. The one downside is that it requires "Hellenist" to refer to Greek-speaking Jews in Acts 6:1 and 9:29 while it refers to non-Jewish Greek people in Acts 11:20. Is this possible? According to linguists, yes. The word "Hellenist" was a broad enough term to refer to any Greek-enculturated person, whether that be a Greeky Jew or a Greeky Greek.
 - The biggest reason I'm convinced that "Hellenist" refers to true Gentiles is that Luke is telling the story of the spread of the Gospel from Jewish people to Gentiles. This best fits the trajectory of the Book of Acts.
 - Schreiner: "A Hellenistic Jew reaches out to Hellenistic Gentiles."

- The above verse therefore contrasts those who limited the scope of God's mission with those who did not. God's people must not limit His work to our own people groups. "God so loved the world..." Therefore, so must we.
- Stott: "The key expression at the end of the last paragraph was 'even to the Gentiles' (18); the key expression of this paragraph is 'to Greeks also' (20)."

21 And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord.

—God's hand in the Book of Acts:

- [Act 4:27-30 ESV] 27 for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, 28 to do whatever **your hand and your plan had predestined** to take place. 29 And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, 30 while you **stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed** through the name of your holy servant Jesus."
- [Act 7:49-50 ESV] 49 "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest? 50 **Did not my hand make all these things?**"
- [Act 11:21 ESV] 21 And the **hand of the Lord was with them**, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord.
- [Act 13:11 ESV] 11 And now, behold, the **hand of the Lord is upon you**, and you will be blind and unable to see the sun for a time." Immediately mist and darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking people to lead him by the hand.

—God's hand predestines things; God's hand heals and performs signs and wonders; God's hand created everything; God's hand blesses our ministry efforts; God's hand opposes our enemies.

—The hand of the Lord symbolizes His strength and agency. God acts on our behalf and for His glory with great power. This was evident in Antioch by how many people "turned to the Lord."

—O, how we need "the hand of the Lord" to bless our labors! Without God's strength and agency, our strength and agency amount to nothing. "Unless the Lord builds the house, it's builders labor in vain" (Ps. 127:1).

—"hand of the Lord... turned to the Lord... added to the Lord":

- The last expression ("added to the Lord") comes later in verse 24. But it's interesting to group these together. It helps us see the Lord's activity more clearly.
- The Lord is Jesus throughout most of Acts and the New Testament.
- Jesus is the One who turns people to Jesus. We can preach, but salvation is ultimately His work. By His hand—His strength and agency—dead hearts are made alive.
- By the hand of Jesus, people turn to Jesus, and then they are added to Jesus.
- To turn to the Lord is to be added to the Lord—to become part of His body. Jesus doesn't save us only to isolate us. He joins us to Himself; He joins us to His church.

—"a great number who believed turned to the Lord":

- We might naturally think that believing and turning to the Lord are the same thing.
- They belong together under the labels "faith" and "repentance," two words that comprise Christian conversion. Acts 20:21: "testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of **repentance** toward God and of **faith** in our Lord Jesus Christ."
- However, they are not precisely the same. Faith is confidence in God. Repentance is "a change of mind" about God and sin. Faith trusts; repentance turns.

—Schnabel: "It is the 'hand of the Lord' that made the preaching of the Jerusalem witnesses effective, resulting in conversions (11:21). Barnabas attributes the establishment of a congregation to the 'grace of God' (11:23). The continued growth of the church is the result of Barnabas's ministry, who is 'full of the Holy Spirit' (11:24)." In short, God builds His church.

22 The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch.

—Jerusalem is still the headquarters of the global church. Later in the story, the church's global mission will center on Antioch.

—As long as Jerusalem remains the missional headquarters, Luke continues highlighting how they receive reports from the mission field:

- Samaritans (8:14-17): “Now when the **apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God**, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.”
- Gentiles (Acts 11:1-3, 18): “Now the **apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God**. So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, “You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them.”... **When they heard these things** they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, “Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.”

—When the Samaritans and Gentiles receive the Word of God for the first time, God ensures the presence and blessing of some from “the Twelve”—the original apostolic band.

—By the time the Spirit baptizes Gentiles in Acts 10-11, however, the church in Jerusalem no longer sends from among the Twelve in response to a report on the field. Instead, they send Barnabas. Why? That ship had already sailed. The baptism of the Spirit had already spread to Gentiles. Antioch didn’t need an apostolic delegation to receive the Spirit. After the experience of Cornelius, everybody received the Spirit at conversion. (Acts 19:1-7 is not an exception to this. See Study Guide from October 2, 2022, about the Baptism vs. Filling of the Holy Spirit.)

—“Barnabas”:

- Barnabas would later be labeled an apostle (14:4, 14), but that did not put him on the level of the original Twelve. The early church distinguished between “the twelve” (1 Cor. 15:5) and other “apostles” (15:7). The latter are “messengers (Gk. *apostolos*) of the churches” (2 Cor 8:23), which meant “missionaries.” The former have their names inscribed on the foundation stones of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:14).
- Barnabas means “son of encouragement” (Acts 4:36). We’ll see his name in action later, when he “exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose” (11:23). We also saw it in the way he vouched for Saul before a skeptical audience of Saul’s former enemies (9:27). The testimony of Barnabas enabled Saul to go “in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord” (9:28). In our present chapter, we observe Barnabas again believing in Saul. He travels to Tarsus to recruit him, bringing him back to Antioch, where they teach the church (11:26) and become effective missionaries (ch. 13-14). Barnabas was one of those guys who believed in you when nobody else did. He saw the good in Saul when everyone else saw only the bad. Later, he’ll see the good in Mark. It will lead to a dispute between Saul and Barnabas. We’ll save that discussion for Acts 15.
- We also learn from Acts 4 that Barnabas was a Levite, and he was extremely generous, having sold a field and donated it to the church. Because of this generosity, it makes sense that the church would have selected him to carry an offering (11:30).
- Everybody needs a Barnabas. We need somebody who believes in us when nobody else does. We need someone who opens doors and seeks opportunities out for us. We need someone who sees our gifting and calls it out of us.
- In this passage, Barnabas is the more prominent of the duo. By Acts 13, Saul will take the lead road. Humble Barnabas lets him. For him, this is not about a spotlight. He saw Saul’s gifting long ago. Saul’s ascendancy in no way threatens him. It blesses him.
- Lord, would you give us all more Barnabases in our lives! And help us to be a Barnabas for somebody else! May we not feel threatened by the blessing of others. May we be blessed by the blessing of others!
- Schnabel: “Luke consistently portrays Barnabas as a bridge-builder between people.”
- Stott (quoting Barclay) describes Barnabas as “the man with the biggest heart in the church.”

23 When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, 24 for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord.

—"saw the grace of God": how do you see grace? By its effects. Grace works. It worked in Antioch when the Lord Jesus sovereignly extended His "hand" so that "a great number... turned to the Lord" (11:21). O God, may we see Your grace in our local body! Extend Your hand to bless!

—"he was glad":

- Grace makes you glad. It makes you more glad than raises, job promotions, new cars, and earthly pleasures. Where we derive our gladness from says much about our character.
- Before Peter's experience, the Jewish church had criticized Peter for his openness to Gentiles. Barnabas welcomes them without critique.

—"he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose":

- Here, we see "Barnabas the Encourager" doing what he does.
- The NASB reads, "Then when he arrived and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord."
- The NASB assigns the "resolute heart" (or "steadfast purpose," ESV) to Barnabas. He exhorted them with a resolute heart and with steadfast purpose. Most translations resemble the ESV, associating the steadfastness with Barnabas's audience. In other words, there is some debate over whether Barnabas was steadfast in his exhortation or whether he exhorted the believers to be steadfast.
- Either way, Barnabas exhorts them to be faithful. As believers, we should consistently encourage others to remain faithful to the Lord. When they begin to drift, we should speak up. Before they drift, we should also speak up. We all need each other "speaking the truth in love" to stay true to Jesus in a world that hates Him.

—"good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith":

- Luke also describes Stephen as "full of the Holy Spirit and of faith." To be "full of the Holy Spirit" is different from being "filled with the Holy Spirit." The latter is a repeatable empowerment of the Spirit for ministry (Acts 4:8, 31). The former is a character trait. Like Stephen, Barnabas was characterized by the fruit and power of the Spirit.
- To be full of faith means to have great confidence in God.
- Luke not only uses the same language to describe Stephen but also references Stephen in 11:19. This seems intentional. In 11:19, Luke makes the point that Stephen's heroic martyrdom continued the expansion of the church. It bore fruit even after he was gone. In the same way, Barnabas bears tremendous fruit for the kingdom, for he shares the same characteristics of Stephen: "full of the Holy Spirit and of faith."
- If we want a fruitful ministry like Barnabas and Stephen, we must be full of the Spirit and faith. It makes sense that Luke mentions faith and the Spirit together, for they work in tandem. The more faith we have, the more Spirit we have. That is, the more faith we have, the more we will experience the Spirit's working in our lives.

—"great many people were added to the Lord":

- I commented on this under 11:21.
- The people "added to the Lord" correlates to Barnabas's exhortations. Barnabas exhorted the people to remain faithful to Jesus. Because they were built up in faith, they shared their faith with others.
- Some churches focus their entire church on evangelism, and believers have little access to ongoing discipleship. This leaves the church immature and unhealthy. Healthy churches exhort the faithful to follow Jesus at all costs. Instead of gearing the whole church toward evangelism—to the exclusion of ongoing discipleship—a healthy church makes healthy disciples who are always "preaching the Lord Jesus" wherever they go (11:20). Put differently, healthy churches don't just invite the lost to "hear the evangelist preacher" on a Sunday morning. Rather, they train the church to be evangelists by developing them as healthy disciples of Jesus.
- Stott: "When we see 'the Lord adding to the Lord', so that he is both subject and object, source and goal, of evangelism, we have to repent of all self-centered, self-confident concepts of the Christian mission."

25 So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, 26 and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.

—Tarsus was Saul's hometown, to which he fled persecution (9:30).

—Barnabas had to "look for Saul", implying he did not immediately find him. This is probably because Saul had been engaging in missions in the surrounding regions.

—"For a whole year": the adjective "whole" suggests Luke intended to emphasize the duration of their stay. Why? It highlights how the church in Antioch received intense and thorough discipleship. They were true followers of Jesus. This was not just an accidental church plant with an overstated significance. Antioch had been intensely disciplined by two of the church's most preeminent figures; Antioch had flourished with numerical growth just like Jerusalem; Antioch is where disciples were first called Christians—probably in derision—meaning that the pagan culture took notice of the burgeoning movement. In short, Luke wants us to know that just like the Jerusalem church, the Antioch church resulted from a true movement of God's Holy Spirit.

—I love that Barnabas "went to Tarsus to look for Saul" and "brought him to Antioch." I love this for two reasons. First, as I stated, Barnabas saw potential in people that nobody else saw. He noticed the good, whereas others noticed the bad. He was an opportunist. Second, the early church never ministered alone. Barnabas knew he needed help shepherding these converts. Later, the two will engage in missions. When they split up, they don't go at it alone. Barnabas pairs with Mark and Paul with Silas. Ministry is a team sport. Jesus is the only One who could have done it all Himself, yet He chose a team. I define a team as "friends on a mission."

—"met with the church": Luke applies the term "church" to the Gentiles in Antioch. The "church" in Antioch was just as much a part of God's family as the "church" in Jerusalem.

27 Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius). 29 So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. 30 And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

—Stott: "This second visit of Saul's to Jerusalem, which Luke records here, seems (although not all scholars agree with this) to be the same as the second visit which Paul himself mentions in Galatians 2:1-10. The parallels are striking. He writes there that he traveled 'with Barnabas', that he went 'in response to a revelation' (i.e. Agabus's prophecy), and that the leaders urged him to 'continue to remember the poor', which was 'the very thing' he was 'eager to do', namely in bringing the famine relief."

—Prophets visited other churches. They did not always minister exclusively in a local setting.

—Jerusalem sent Barnabas and prophets to Antioch. Antioch sent financial relief to Jerusalem. Jerusalem and Antioch had different strengths. Having been around longer, the church in Jerusalem had people. Being an economic hub, the church in Antioch had money. Therefore, Jerusalem sent people and Antioch sent funds. Every church has unique strengths, but God never intended those to be turned inward. He blesses each local congregation with unique capabilities that can bless the global church.

—Luke quotes Agabus, but other "prophets" came also. Prophets work together in Acts:

- 13:1: Now there were in the church at Antioch **prophets** and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.
- 15:32: And Judas and Silas, who were themselves **prophets**, encouraged and strengthened the brothers with many words.
- 21:9: He had **four unmarried daughters, who prophesied**.

—It seems like Antioch developed prophetic teams over time. At first, prophets visited them from Jerusalem; later, prophets formed part of their core leadership team. We can't say whether this is precisely how it happened, but the narrative leans in that direction.

—"foretold by the Spirit": to speak "by (Gk. *dia*) the Spirit" is Luke's language for "prophesied." We observe the same thing in 21:4, where "through (Gk. *dia*) the Spirit they were telling Paul not to go to Jerusalem." Acts 21:4 is an example of an inaccurate prophecy. Prophets can "miss it" without necessarily being called false prophets.

—One function of prophecy is to predict the future.

—Agabus predicts a famine that will harm the entire Roman world. There is a place for national level prophecy. Despite modern abuses, we should not forbid prophesying over nations.

—Nevertheless, we should make a few observations about the national prophetic ministry of Agabus:

- This was not a prosperity message. It was a famine message. We should always exercise caution with national prophetic ministry, but this is especially true with messages of prosperity. Throughout Israel's history, one mark of a false prophet was the promise of blessing detached from repentance and obedience.
 - In the days of Ahab and Jehoshaphat, they sought a prophetic word about whether to enter battle, and all the prophets promised victory. Jehoshaphat interjected, "Is there not here another prophet of the LORD of whom we may inquire" (1 Kings 22:7)? Ahab mentioned Micaiah, saying, "I hate him, for he never prophesies good concerning me, but evil" (22:8). Ahab surrounded himself with "yes prophets" who only prophesied prosperity, but Micaiah saw the heavenly reality: they were filled with a "lying spirit" (22:22). Micaiah proceeded to prophesy death and military defeat for Ahab—and nailed it.
 - Jeremiah 23 provides another example of false prophets who proclaimed prosperity and mocked Jeremiah's hard prophecies.
 - False prophets are praised; true prophets are mocked (Luke 6:22-23, 26).
- Agabus had enough street cred with the church in Jerusalem that when he prophesied, the whole church responded by preparing for the famine. His prophecies do not resemble a Christian horoscope. He did not just sling mud on the wall to see if it sticks. Many modern prophets do just that. They proclaim dozens of oracles over nations, and when one seems kind of right, they clip it out and blast it online. It might be impressive by itself, but beside the countless wrong prophecies, it seems more like a good guess. Agabus was different. Nobody took his word as a guess.
- Agabus had a team. A church in Jerusalem sent him; a group of prophets traveled with him. Prophecies should be weighed and evaluated by a team before being responded to by the multitudes. When you hear YouTube prophets spouting predictions about elections and economics, ask: who are this person's elders? Who vouches for his/her character (a mark of false prophets is character, Matt. 7)? Who weighed this word before it went out—besides the person sharing it?

—Luke intends through this passage to show how the churches in Antioch and Jerusalem resembled each other and shared with each other. God achieved through the Cornelius episode what He set out to do. He set out to create a unified church of Jews and Gentiles. The resemblance between Antioch and Jerusalem shows that the same Spirit blessed both. The cooperation between Antioch and Jerusalem shows that the same Spirit united both.

—"this took place in the days of Claudius": the Jewish historian Josephus confirms this fact.

—"everyone according to his ability":

- Financial giving is an "everyone" sport. God doesn't just expect rich people to give. All Christians must give because we bear the name of Christ, who gave it all for us. When the truth of the gospel settles in your heart, it transforms your heart to love generosity.
- Even though "everyone" gives, they each give only according to their ability. God does not expect poor people to give a million dollars because it's beyond their ability. Nor does He expect rich people to give only a few dollars because it's beneath their ability.
- Paul has similar instructions for the Corinthians: "On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper..." (1 Cor. 16:2). These instructions relate to "the collection for the saints" (16:1), which Paul intends to gather when he arrives. Just as we see in Acts 11, he instructs the saints to set aside funds in proportion to their income.
- In 1 Corinthians 16, however, Paul adds that this should be done "on the first day of every week"—Sunday—the day the church gathered for worship. This means that giving should be both proportional and regular.
- Furthermore, since it is "the first day" of the week, it implies that we are to give of our "firstfruits." This means we don't wait until we've spent everything and give God our leftovers. We give God the first and the best of our income because we worship Him, not money. By giving to Him first, we honor Him and show that we trust Him to provide "the rest of the harvest" we need.
- Given what Paul adds in 2 Cor. 8, we could round this out by saying Christians should give regularly, proportionally, sacrificially, and cheerfully.

—"by the hand of Barnabas and Saul":

- Beginning in the next verse, Acts 12:1-24 seem to ignore the Antioch narrative altogether. Then in 12:25, we read, "And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had completed their

service..." This leads right into 13:1-3, where the Holy Spirit says to set apart Barnabas and Saul for mission work.

- This is all related. Luke is developing his theme of faithfulness. Stephen and Philip faithfully served tables, so God made them preachers and miracle workers. Saul and Barnabas faithfully transported the offering from Antioch to Jerusalem, so God made them apostles who planted churches around the Mediterranean. When we are faithful in the little things, God gives us greater things.