



Barnabas Encourages Christians in Antioch

Acts 11:19-26

BIBLE BACKGROUND
FOR LEADERS

Reason to Praise

In the chapters leading up to today's passage, God revealed to Peter that the message of Christ is not only for Jews but for non-Jews as well. Peter then took that message to the household of Cornelius, a Roman centurion, and God poured out the Holy Spirit on these non-Jews who then came to faith in Christ. The Jerusalem church had a hard time accepting that non-Jews could become believers in Christ, but after Peter explained everything that had happened, they praised God that he had granted even the Gentiles eternal life through Jesus (Acts 10:1-11:18).

Reason to Scatter

In today's passage, we see that the early followers of Christ had been scattered from Jerusalem because of the persecution that began after Stephen was killed. The Jews had stoned him after he accused them of killing the Messiah, Jesus. But everywhere the scattered followers went, they told people about Jesus (Acts 7:1-8:4).

Spreading the News

The believers who were scattered to Antioch, at that time the third largest city in the Roman Empire, began sharing the message of Christ not only with the many Jews who lived there, but also with the non-Jews. When Jerusalem's church heard that a great number of people had turned to the Lord, they were ready to accept these non-Jewish believers, and they sent Barnabas (whose name means "Son of Encouragement") to see what was happening and to contribute to the spreading of the gospel message.

Barnabas invited Saul (whom we know as the Apostle Paul) to Antioch for a year to help teach because the church was expanding so quickly. Barnabas had befriended Saul and defended him before the apostles

in Jerusalem after Saul had met Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-30).

What happened in Antioch was significant because it was, apparently, the first time Jewish and non-Jewish Christians joined together in fellowship. People there were accustomed to rubbing shoulders with people of different backgrounds and of different ethnic groups. The church in Antioch set a wonderful example for churches to follow in centuries to come.

The Jesus Connection

As the text tells us, Jesus' followers were first called Christians in Antioch. It's significant that in Antioch this diverse group of followers took on a name that means "like Christ." As they lived out Jesus' example and encouraged others in the faith, people noticed. What a compliment it would be for others to consider us to be like Jesus!

Pray about how your life can reflect Jesus in a way that would help draw others to God. You can write your prayer here.



BIBLE FOCUS (THE BASICS)

Stephen had just been stoned to death, just because he believed in Jesus. Can you imagine how afraid the other believers were? They didn't want to suffer the same thing, so they scattered and only told people who were like themselves about Jesus.

But there was one group of people in a town called Antioch who told *everyone* about Jesus, not just people in the same social group. When the church in Jerusalem heard about this, they sent Barnabas (his name actually means *encourager*) to see what was up. When he got to Antioch, he was quite impressed! He saw evidence of God's grace on everyone! So, he encouraged them to keep up the good work.

Barnabas quickly went to Tarsus to pick up Saul so he could see what was going on in Antioch. Then for a whole year, Barnabas and Saul stuck around Antioch to teach and encourage the Christians there.

Key Verse: "But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness" (Hebrews 3:13).

Bible Point: Encourage each other to believe in Jesus.



FAMILY FUN **Courageous Encouragement**

At mealtime, take turns encouraging each other. Start with the youngest person in the family, and have each person say something encouraging about that family member by finishing the sentence "What I like about [name of family member] is..." When all family members have said something encouraging, move on to the next person. Continue until everyone has had a turn being encouraged by everyone else.

Daily Challenge

Choose a way you'll be an encouragement to others this week:

- Watch for a time when someone in your family seems discouraged this week. Then encourage him or her with words or actions.
- Decide to go out of your way to encourage at least one person every day. Write down in a journal what you did or said, and then pray for the people you encouraged.
- Send a card to a Christian friend, telling that person you appreciate him or her. Encourage your friend with your words. You could even draw an encouraging picture in your letter.

THE WORD FOR THE WEEK

MONDAY **Ephesians 2:10**

Why would encouraging others be something God has prepared in advance for you to do?

TUESDAY **Philippians 2:13**

How has God worked in you?

WEDNESDAY **Hebrews 10:24**

How is it good to spur others on toward love?

THURSDAY **2 Corinthians 12:9**

Why do you think God works best in our weakness? How does that encourage you?

FRIDAY **Isaiah 40:31**

How does this verse encourage you? How can you use this verse to encourage others?

SATURDAY **1 John 4:7**

How does encouragement show your love for God and others?