

The Church in the New Testament

(Sunday AM — Church Campus)

Week 5: Growing Disciples-- Acts 11:19–26

The church at Antioch occupies a special place in the story of the early church. It was born out of persecution. When believers were scattered from Jerusalem after the death of Stephen, some traveled as far as Antioch (a major city in the Roman Empire) and began preaching the gospel. At first they spoke only to Jews, but soon some began sharing the message with Gentiles as well. And the hand of the Lord was with them: a great number believed and turned to the Lord.

When the church in Jerusalem heard what was happening, they sent Barnabas to Antioch. Barnabas was the right man for the moment—a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith. He saw the grace of God at work, encouraged the believers, and then did something remarkable: he went to Tarsus to find Saul and brought him back to Antioch. For an entire year, they taught the church and disciplined a large number of people.

It was at Antioch that believers were first called “Christians.” This was not a denominational label; it was a recognition that these people belonged to Christ and their lives reflected it. Antioch became a model of what a growing, disciple-making church looks like: gospel-centered, Spirit-led, and committed to teaching.

Group Discussion: The church at Antioch was born out of persecution and grew because ordinary believers shared the gospel wherever they went. What does this teach about how churches grow, and how does it challenge the idea that evangelism is only for preachers?

Personal Reflection: Barnabas invested a full year teaching and discipling at Antioch. Who has invested time in your spiritual growth, and how are you investing in the growth of others?

Read Acts 11:19–26

Study Questions

1. In verse 19, believers scattered by persecution “went as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch.” How did God use persecution to advance the gospel, and what does this teach about His sovereignty?
2. Verse 20 says some began “speaking to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus.” Why was this step significant, and what does it reveal about the universal nature of the gospel?
3. According to verse 21, “the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord.” What does it mean for the hand of the Lord to be with the church’s work?

4. In verse 22, the Jerusalem church sends Barnabas to Antioch. Why was it important for established churches to support and encourage new congregations?
5. Verse 23 says Barnabas “saw the grace of God” and “was glad.” What did the grace of God look like in this young congregation, and how do we recognize it today?
6. Barnabas “exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose” (v. 23). Why is this kind of encouragement essential for new believers?
7. Verse 24 describes Barnabas as “a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.” What qualities made Barnabas effective in this work, and how should this shape the kind of people we send to strengthen congregations?
8. In verse 25, Barnabas goes to Tarsus to find Saul. What does Barnabas’s decision to seek out Saul teach about recognizing and developing the gifts of others?
9. Verse 26 says they “met with the church and taught a great many people” for a whole year. What does this commitment to sustained teaching reveal about what it takes to build a healthy church?
10. Looking at Acts 11:19–26 as a whole, what principles of evangelism, discipleship, and church growth does this passage model for congregations today?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: **Acts 9:26–28** — Barnabas vouching for Saul in Jerusalem; **Matthew 28:18–20** — The Great Commission: making disciples of all nations; **2 Timothy 2:1–2** — Entrusting the gospel to faithful people who will teach others