

Fact Sheet for “Four E’s” Acts 11:19-30

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Encouragement

What makes sharing the gospel difficult in our day... corrupt culture, religious persecution, big city mentality? Consider the context of the city of Antioch.

Antioch of Syria was founded about 300 B.C. by Seleucus I Nicator, who named it after either his father or his son, both of whom bore the name Antiochus. It was situated on the Orontes River about three hundred miles north of Jerusalem and twenty miles east of the Mediterranean. To distinguish it from some fifteen other Asiatic cities built by Seleucus and also named Antioch, it was frequently called 'Antioch-on-the-Orontes. It was, after Rome and Alexandria, the third largest city in the empire, having a population of more than 500,000, and was a melting pot of Western and Eastern cultures, where Greek and Roman traditions mingled with Semitic, Arab, and Persian influences. The Jewish population is estimated to have been about one-seventh of the total population

It was beautifully situated and carefully planned, and it was a commercial center. But it was also a vile city, with gross immorality and ritual prostitution as part of its temple worship. The Roman satirist, Juvenal, complained, “The sewage of the Syrian Orontes has for long been discharged into the Tiber.” By this he meant that Antioch was so corrupt it was impacting Rome, more than 1,300 miles away.

And yet... it was the birthplace of foreign missions (13:2)... the home base for Paul's outreach to the eastern half of the empire... the place where those of 'the Way' (9:2) were first called 'Christians' (11:26)... was where the question as to the necessity for Gentile converts to submit to the rite of circumcision first arose (15:2; cf. Gal 2:11-21)... and had among its earliest teachers such persons as Barnabas, Paul, and Peter (cf. Gal 2:11-13).

This is a wonderful encouragement for us today! The church can flourish in even the most difficult of environments! Pray! Keep yourself close to the Lord!

Exhortation

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.**

Review Acts 8:1 and the scattering of the church. Consider that they initially spoke 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.**

“Hellenists” were Greek speaking non-Jews. This is a crucial hinge in the Acts account. For the first time the church actively proselytized Gentiles. It was a bold and critical move by these believers.

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,** ^{24a} **for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.**

New American Standard – “with resolute heart to remain *true* to the Lord”
Net Bible – “remain true to the Lord with devoted hearts”

Barnabas was a wise choice. He a gracious gentleman as attested by his nickname “Son of Encouragement” (4:36). He is named 28 times in 3 books (Acts, 1 Corinthians, Galatians). The biblical word translated “encouragement” is also the word translated “exhortation” (see Romans 12:6-8). In the NT you need to pull together “encouragement” and “exhortation” in your thinking. Barnabas would encourage them in their faith by graciously exhorting them to dedication to Christ.

24b And a great many people were added to the Lord.

See Acts 2:41, 47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:1; 9:31. All of this happened during a time of religious and civil persecution, and in a culture of great moral decadence. What can stop the gospel today?

25 So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, ^{26a} and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch.

The work in Antioch grew to such proportions Barnabas needed aid, and he could think of no one better suited for the work than Saul who was living in Tarsus (cf. 9:30).

26b For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.

Enlightenment

27 ¶ Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch.

Consider Samuel.

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).

“Agabus is also mentioned again in 21:10-11. Why is this prophecy by Agabus mentioned here?---To lead into the next verse!

Engagement

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.

Many of these were Gentiles! This was ministry!

Four E's...

Encouragement

The church CAN thrive in difficult circumstances.

Exhortation

Remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose.

Enlightenment

The marks of a true prophet

Engagement

How is God calling you to minister?