

"A Test for the Church at Antioch"

Acts 11:27-30

Introduction: The past couple of weeks we have been looking at Acts 11 and in this chapter were able to see the establishment of the church in Antioch. This church was planted as some of the Jews who were escaping persecution preached the Gospel to the Grecians in Antioch. The Gospel was readily accepted by these Gentiles and many believed. The church continued to grow and needed leadership and so the church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas. As Barnabas disciplined the new converts the church continued to grow and it became more than he could manage. Barnabas knew he could not do all that needed to be done so he left in search of Saul who was at Tarsus. When he found him, they both returned and stayed in Antioch for an entire year discipling the Gentile believers. It was during this time that there would be a test for the church.

I. The Announcement

Acts 11:27-28

There was a prophet from Jerusalem named Agabus who prophesied of a coming "dearth" which would be a famine. This man was a true prophet and he will show up again in Acts 21.

Acts 21:10-12

¹⁰ *And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judaea a certain prophet, named Agabus.*

¹¹ *And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.*

¹² *And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem.*

We will get to the prophecy concerning the famine in a moment. First, however, we need to understand what a "prophet" was. They were people who revealed Truth from God.

Application:

Today the office of the prophet does not exist. Why would we need prophets today since we have the completed Word of God? Let us notice something else.

Ephesians 2:19-21

¹⁹ Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God;

²⁰ And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;

²¹ In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord:

The apostles and the prophets formed the foundation of the church. If they are the foundation and we are the stones that make up the building then there is certainly no longer a need for more foundation. When the foundation was complete the offices of prophets and apostles ceased to exist. There is no New Revelation today.

1 John 4:1

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

Jeremiah has a message for us today.

Jeremiah 23:16

¹⁶ Thus saith the LORD of hosts, Hearken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you: they make you vain: they speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the LORD.

People who would claim to be prophets today are what the Bible calls false prophets. We have in the Bible all the prophecy that God wants us to have. God is not sending out prophets with New Revelation today.

Notice Acts 11:27-28 again.

Agabus was not a false prophet because his message came from the Spirit of the Lord. The famine spoken of by Agabus is something that Josephus, the Jewish historian, wrote about.

"Herod, the brother of Agrippa who had perished, was allowed to govern over Chalcis. He asked Claudius Caesar for control over the temple along with the sacred treasury, and the ability to choose the high priests, and he was given all that he had asked for. Around this time lived queen Helena of Adiabene, along with her son Izates. They both began to follow the Jewish way, turning away from their past lifestyle . . . Her arrival was of great help to the masses in Jerusalem; for there was a famine in the land that overtook them, and many people died of starvation. When it became necessary to obtain food abroad, Queen Helena

sent some of her attendants, with money, to the city of Alexandria to purchase as much grain as possible. She also sent others to the island of Cyprus to bring back dried figs. This whole process happened very quickly, and as soon as they had returned, they handed the provisions out to those who were in dire need of them. Because of this, she left behind a legacy and was held in great respect by the people and the nation at large. And when her son Izates became aware of this famine, he sent a large gift to the leaders in Jerusalem."

Notice Acts 11:29

Here we see how the church at Antioch responded. The church in Jerusalem was already struggling because of the persecution which had come upon them and when this famine came it would only make the situation even much worse. The believers at Antioch knew this and they were immediately ready to do all they could to help meet the needs of the believers in Jerusalem. These believers gave according to their ability to give. These Gentiles past the test that was set before them. God sent the prophets to them to make them aware of the coming famine to test them. They responded exactly the way in which God desired.

There are two things that we can see in the Gentile believers as they gave to the saints in Jerusalem:

1. Love for the saints.

John 13:34-35

³⁴ *A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.*

³⁵ *By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*

These people truly had a love for the saints. They were not forced into giving but it was out of their love for the saints that they gave. This tells us that they were walking in the Spirit.

1 Thessalonians 4:9-10

⁹ *But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.*

¹⁰ *And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more;*

Application:

We too are faced with many tests of our love for other believers. When we are walking with the Lord there will be love in our hearts for fellow believers. Paul reminds us of how important our love for others is.

1 Corinthians 13:1-3

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

² And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.

³ And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

There is yet something else that we can see in the saints at Antioch.

2. Faith in God to meet their own needs.

It is one thing to give but to give when you know there is something coming that is going to make it difficult for us is giving in great faith. Let us notice what Paul taught about giving to the church at Corinth.

2 Corinthians 9:1, 5-8

For as touching the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you:

⁵ Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren, that they would go before unto you, and make up beforehand your bounty, whereof ye had notice before, that the same might be ready, as a matter of bounty, and not as of covetousness.

⁶ But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.

⁷ Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.

⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work:

In verse 8 Paul is addressing those who might be hesitant to give because of what the future may bring. He therefore reminds them that as they gave, God was able to continue to meet their needs as well.

Application:

When we give to meet the needs of others our giving testifies of two things in our lives. Love and faith., James tells us how faith responds to the needs of others.

James 2:14-18

14 What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?

15 If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food,

16 And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?

17 Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

18 Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.

Let me take you back to the church at Antioch. Notice the words of James Montgomery Boice.

"As far as I know, this is the first charitable act of this nature in all recorded history—one race of people collecting money to help another people. No wonder they were first called Christians at Antioch."

This church at Antioch set the example for all other churches to follow. Let me now ask a question. Why were they so willing to give to people whom they did not know? Most likely it was because of what the church in Jerusalem had done for them. They sent Barnabas to teach and to instruct them and therefore they were extremely thankful for what the church in Jerusalem had done. Notice the words of Warren Wiersbe.

"An important spiritual principle is illustrated in this passage: if people have been a spiritual blessing to us, we should minister to them out of our material possessions."

He then points to a verse in Galatians.

Galatians 6:6

⁶ Let him that is taught in the word communicate [share] unto him that teacheth in all good things.

Notice Acts 11:29 again.

I want you to notice that **every man** gave something. This church understood something that needs to be understood by many today. They understood that everything they had belonged to the Lord. It was not theirs but it was the Lord's and they were just stewards of what had been entrusted to them.

Notice Acts 11:30

The gift was gathered and it was taken to the saints at Jerusalem in the hands of Saul and Barnabas. We need to notice the first part of the verse which reads, "Which also they did." In the previous verse they determined to send relief but there was some time that passed from the time they were determined and when they actually sent to help. The point we need to see is that they followed through with their promise to help. I want you to see something very important in all of this.

Conclusion:

Acts 11:19-20

¹⁹ Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only.

²⁰ And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the LORD Jesus.

There was a divide between the Jews and the Gentiles that we see here. Not with all but with some there was. Then we come to the end of the chapter and we see that the divide is bridged with love.