

Memory Verse

“And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.” (Acts 11:21)

Knowledge of God’s Will [God’s Word]	Knowledge of God [God’s Divine Nature]	Good Work [Behavior]
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The church needs good workers who are full of faith, the Holy Spirit, and good morals.2. The church grows when its members study and are led by God’s word.3. The church is characterized by its generosity and servitude.	God is Spirit, and He is with us when we follow His will.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Devote ourselves to God’s word by transforming our character, giving and serving, and spreading the gospel.2. Have a living and effective faith.

Overview

Events and Spiritual Teachings

- A. The Church at Antioch
- B. The Grace of God
- C. Good Workers for Christ
- D. Relief for the Brethren in Judea

Life Application

1. Devoting Ourselves to God’s Word
2. A Living and Effective Faith

Memory Verse

Conclusion: God’s grace is truly evident in times of tribulation. God’s hand will always be with us when we do His work according to His will and have a living and effective faith.

Introduction

The Acts of the Apostles details how the Christian movement and the works of the Holy Spirit spread from Jerusalem to Samaria, Syria, Greece, Rome, and beyond. During our last lesson, we saw how the gospel was spread to the Gentiles in Caesarea. In this lesson, we will see how the gospel was spread north along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea to the city of Antioch in Syria.

Antioch was the capital city in the Roman province of Syria. It was the third largest city in the Roman Empire with a population of more than a quarter of a million people, many of whom were Gentiles. It was widely known for its tolerant attitude towards different religions and cultures, which was probably why so many Christians that had been scattered by persecution settled there. This environment also made it favorable for preaching. Apart from that, Antioch was located on several of the most important trade routes of that time, making traveling to other parts of the Roman Empire easier and more efficient (*BSG: Acts, 97*)¹.

A. The Church at Antioch (Acts 11:19–26)

The Antioch church began with a small group of persecuted refugees, but soon exploded both in numbers and in reputation among believers and non-believers. Its growth was so remarkable that the Bible records in three separate verses how it grew.

- “And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.” (v. 21)
- “For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord.” (v. 24)
- “And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.” (v. 26)

From these verses, we can see three things that contributed to the church’s growth: the hand of the Lord was with them, they had good workers to serve the church, and all the members were willing to study and be led by God’s word together. The members’ eagerness to study, share, and follow God’s word made the church a leading example in Christendom. But how was this Gentile church first established?

1. Persecution and the Scattering of the Believers

It is amazing to know how this church started. Let’s read Acts 8:1–3:

Now Saul was consenting to [Stephen’s] death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.

Stephen’s death sparked a great persecution against Christians. For the first time since the

¹ TJC Department of Literary Ministry, “Did You Know...? 1”, *Bible Study Guide: Acts*, (U.S.A.: True Jesus Church 2002), 97

descent of the Holy Spirit, scores of believers were being actively and violently persecuted for their faith in Christ. This persecution drove the believers to flee from Jerusalem, scattering them across the country.

2. Spreading the Gospel

Let's now read Acts 11:19–20.

Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only. But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus.

Contrary to expectations, Stephen's death and the rise in persecution did not make Jesus' followers hide their beliefs; in fact, they seemed more determined than ever to spread the gospel wherever they went. These unnamed believers were neither disciples nor leaders of the church. They were simply brethren who wanted to share the gospel with others, and there were no limits to where or with whom they shared it. It may have felt like a dark time for the believers, but in truth, God used the chaos and the evil of the opposition to spread His word and strengthen the church more than ever.

B. The Grace of God

God's grace becomes more visible in times of trouble. As we just learned, the gospel was introduced to Antioch because of persecution. Let's read verses 22–23: "Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch. When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord." Barnabas saw how the gospel had spread and called it the grace of God.

What is the grace of God? Let's examine a few passages from the Bible.

1. "[F]or all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." (Rom 3:23–24)
2. "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." (Eph 1:7)
3. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." (Eph 2:8–9)
4. "For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." (Jn 1:17)
5. "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age." (Tit 2:11–12)

The original Greek word for grace, *charis*, means, "favor" or "loving-kindness." But when it is used in the context of our salvation, it refers to how God offered His only Son to die in our place (2 Cor 5:21). God's grace is something we don't deserve. We did nothing, yet He gave us the precious Holy Spirit and an eternal home with Him (Jn 3:16–18). Because we live by grace, we must cling to Him and remain true to Him no matter what trials we encounter. We need to make a resolution to follow God, and God alone.

C. Good Workers for Christ

The Antioch church's members and workers were a vital part of its growth. Upon arriving there, Barnabas realized that he needed help, so he traveled over one hundred miles to Tarsus to find Saul. The

two stayed with the Antioch church for an entire year and taught a great many people. Acts 11:24 describes Barnabas as “a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.” He practiced what he preached, and worked towards the growth of the church, not his own glory or prosperity.

But it was not just Barnabas and Saul who worked hard. The church’s reputation was such that it was in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians (Acts 11:26). Their lifestyle and conduct testified of God’s grace, distinguishing them from unbelievers and identifying them as followers of Christ (*BSG: Acts*, 251).² Good workers who are close to the Lord and who have the divine qualities of Christ are able to draw others to the Lord through their actions. The Lord also works with them to make their work effective. So, if there are many members who dedicate themselves to God’s word like in Antioch, then the church will grow (*BSG: Acts*, 250).³

D. Relief for the Brethren in Judea

Let’s continue with Acts 11:27–30.

And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar. Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

When the believers in Antioch learned of the famine, they sent relief to Judea through Barnabas and Saul. Just as the Jerusalem church assisted the Antioch church by sending Barnabas to them, the Antioch church now helped their Judean brethren with provisions in a time of famine. The churches showed their love in their deeds (1 Jn 3:18). They trusted God’s guidance and gave what they had to meet their brethren’s needs (*BSG: Acts*, 251).⁴

The Bible records that the members sent relief “each according to his ability” (Acts 11:29). It would have been easy to delegate the task to a few wealthy donors, but every member, compelled by their love, each took up the responsibility to send aid. 2 Corinthians 8:12 says, “For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have.” When everyone in the church learns to take part in giving and offers the best they can, all believers can share in the blessing of giving (2 Cor 9:7–8) (*BSG: Acts*, 251).⁵

Check for Understanding

- 1. How far did the believers scattered by persecution travel to preach the gospel?** They went beyond Judea and Samaria and preached along the Mediterranean coast, going as far as Phoenicia and Antioch, and even crossing the sea to Cyprus.
- 2. What was Barnabas like?** He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. In other words, he had a strong relationship with the Lord and had excellent spiritual qualities.
- 3. When the church in Antioch grew large, what did Barnabas do?** He went to Tarsus to look for Saul and brought him back to Antioch to help him in the ministry.

² “Segment Analysis 12a”, *Bible Study Guide: Acts*, 251

³ “Segment Analysis 8a”, *Bible Study Guide: Acts*, 250

⁴ “Segment Analysis 13-1”, *Bible Study Guide: Acts*, 251

⁵ “Segment Analysis 13-2”, *Bible Study Guide: Acts*, 251

4. **Why do you think the disciples in Antioch were called Christians?** Their lifestyle and conduct testified of God's grace, distinguishing them from unbelievers and identifying them as followers of Christ.
5. **What good example do we see in the believers in Antioch when they found out there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world?** The disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea.

Life Application

1. Devoting Ourselves to God's Word

a. Transforming our character

It is life changing when we devote ourselves to God's word. When we choose to obey God, we become more like Jesus Christ. With their own distinct lifestyle that was so different from the diverse religions of the city, it is no wonder that the believers in Antioch were soon given their own name: Christians. Likewise, our lives should be a living demonstration of the spiritual qualities of our Lord Jesus Christ. We must learn to follow Jesus not only in our beliefs, but also in our conduct, speech, and lifestyle. A true and genuine Christian is someone who has been born as a new man so that others can see the changes in his life. Our lives should become marked by our love for others and obedience to God's word.

Testimony: The Joy of Studying God's Word

When I was in J1 class, I didn't really enjoy reading God's word. I thought to myself, "I already know the Bible's teachings after listening to so many sermons." But once I entered grade twelve, my outlook changed, especially after attending the SSC. I began to ask God for help in understanding the true meaning behind each word in the Bible. I made a determination to devote myself to reading God's word. I began to spend ten to fifteen minutes each day reading a chapter or a passage before praying. I did not rush, but took my time reading God's word several times to ensure I understood the teachings of the day. Sometimes, I would read the same passage repeatedly for a few days. I began to feel more joy, and I saw clearly how God's word changed my life. I began to look at my lifestyle, my words, and my actions, and examine whether or not they matched the teachings of God's word. After doing this for three months, I began to see significant changes in my life – God's word transformed me, and I saw God make my ways prosper! "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success" (Josh 1:8).

– Anonymous

b. Spreading the gospel

We who have received His word also have the duty of sharing the gospel so that others can also be saved. If we depend on full-time ministers, the gospel's spread will be limited. Later in the Acts of the Apostles, we see that even when the church sent Barnabas and Saul to go on a relief mission to Jerusalem, the church continued to function and grow. It did not depend on Barnabas and Saul but operated because every believer did their duty.

To share the gospel, we need to depend on God's power, not on our own. The Antioch church grew only because of the Lord's guidance. Likewise, it is not our own eloquence or persuasion that converts those to whom we preach. God's hand is our divine help, and we need to depend

on the Lord’s power to turn people’s hearts to the Lord (BSG: Acts, 249)⁶

Testimony: The Joy of Sharing the Gospel

Last month during our evangelical service, I met a person who was curious to learn about our beliefs. He simply walked in and joined our service. Afterward, I knew God was telling me to share the gospel. The pastors always teach us that we need to depend on God's power, so I prayed before I went up to greet him. Sure enough, he was very touched by the message that day, and God gave me the courage to testify how I came to know the Lord. I thought this person may not like me and I was afraid, not knowing how to start the conversation. But once I opened my mouth and started sharing, it wasn't as hard as I thought. Deep inside, I was praying to depend on His guidance, and true enough, I felt the abidance of God during the entire conversation. What a joy it is to know that sharing the gospel and leading others to know Him is truly God's will and our duty! "Sing to the LORD, bless His name; proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day. Declare His glory among the nations, His wonders among all peoples" (Ps 96:2–3).

– Anonymous

3. Giving and serving

The apostolic churches taught us two important characteristics of those devoted to God's word: generosity and servitude. 2 Corinthians 9:7 says, “So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.” When others see the willingness with which the members of a church give and serve, they see God’s grace. But these actions don’t have to be big or grandiose – they can be as small as giving our time to another member or cleaning up after someone else. Peter teaches us, “As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Pet 4:10). Not every member is a Barnabas or a Saul, but we each have our own duties to help the church function.

What are some ways you can give and serve within your church?

2. A Living and Effective Faith

We studied how the members of the apostolic church preached the gospel not only with words, but also with their deeds. Barnabas in particular is a good example of a living and effective faith – a faith where he not only believed, but also lived out his faith.

Barnabas’ Faith	Our Faith
a. Full of the Holy Spirit and of Faith	
Barnabas was described as a “good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith,” (Acts 11:24) and also the “Son of Encouragement” (Acts 4:36). His close relationship with God helped Barnabas be an effective worker for the church, because he understood God’s will and followed His guidance.	We can only be an effective worker when we understand God’s will, which requires the fullness of the Holy Spirit and a firm faith in God.
b. Submissive to God’s Calling	

⁶ “Segment Analysis 2-2”, Bible Study Guide: Acts, 249

When Barnabas was sent to Antioch, he did not simply look in on the church and immediately go home. After traveling miles to fetch Saul, he spent a year teaching and ministering the new brethren. Later, when he and Saul were sent out by the Spirit, Barnabas submitted completely to God’s direction.	For us, God’s calling may be something as simple as spending time with a new truth-seeker, or setting aside a week for SSC. Have you submitted to His calling? If He calls you in the future to do His work, will you be able to answer?
c. Conscious of God’s Grace	
At the time, Jewish members of the apostolic church may have been offended at the sight of Gentiles in the church. But when Barnabas came to Antioch, he rejoiced. Their knowledge and understanding of God’s word may have been imperfect as the church was newly founded, but Barnabas looked beyond the surface and saw only the goodness of God’s grace.	It is easy for us to criticize or even look down upon others. It is also easy to be angry or upset when things don’t go our way, or if we feel we have been wronged. But when we are close to God, we become clear-sighted and are able to see God’s grace, no matter the situation.
d. Humble and Strong in God’s Word	
One of the first things Barnabas did in Antioch was get help. He understood that he could not minister the church by himself, and he was humble enough to act on it. Further, he sought help from Saul, who had been known for his persecution of the church. But Barnabas chose to make use of Saul’s strong understanding of the truth (Acts 9:27) – something necessary in as new a church as Antioch’s, which needed workers knowledgeable in God’s word to help teach it to them.	It is important to remember that we cannot do everything by ourselves. Every church is built on its many members, not a single believer. But it takes humility to acknowledge our own lack and to be able to approach others for help. This is especially important when teaching others about God’s word.
e. Trustworthy	
Barnabas, along with Saul, was entrusted with the important task of delivering the relief Antioch had prepared for the churches in Judea. His time in Antioch established him among the members as one who was trustworthy and responsible enough to see the important task through.	When you are entrusted with a task, do you fulfill it to the best of your abilities? God loves those who walk in the Spirit and do good (Gal 5:16; 6:9–10). Further, when we live a Christ-like life, we can lead others naturally to God without speaking a single word.

Memory Verse

“And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.” (Acts 11:21)

Meaning:

1. The apostolic church grew so quickly due to God’s presence. Because His hand was with the Antioch church, a great number believed and turned to the Lord. The more we abide with God, study God’s word, and strengthen our prayer life, the more we will see the hand of the Lord with us. And there is little that is more valuable for us than to have God’s instruction, discipline, and guidance in our lives.
2. To turn to the Lord means having true, genuine repentance and changing our ways to follow the Lord. This involves putting off the “old man” and putting on the “new man” (Eph 4:22–24). It means

changing our mindset so that we no longer follow the values of the world, but the values of our Lord Jesus Christ who gave His life for us.

Conclusion

God's grace is truly evident in times of tribulation. God used the persecution following Stephen's death to spread His word across the land, and Barnabas, sent by the Jerusalem members to the new church in Antioch, clearly saw the grace of God at work in the growing numbers of the brethren. God's hand will always be with us when we do His work according to His will and have a living and effective faith.

Lesson 6 Homework Assignment Answer Key

1. What does it mean to “turn to the Lord”?
It means having true, genuine repentance and changing our ways to follow the Lord. This involves putting off the “old man” and putting on the “new man” by changing our mindset so that we no longer follow the values of the world, but the values of our Lord Jesus.
2. How did the gospel come to Antioch?
After Stephen’s death, a great persecution arose against followers of Jesus, leading to the scattering of the believers across the country, who preached as they went.
3. Why were the believers first called Christians in Antioch?
Their lifestyle and conduct testified of God’s grace, distinguishing them from unbelievers and identifying them as followers of Christ.
4. What does it mean to be a good worker for Christ?
Good workers are close to the Lord and have the divine qualities of Christ. They are able to draw others to the Lord through their actions.
5. What are three ways we should devote ourselves to God’s word?
By transforming our character, spreading the gospel, and giving and serving.
6. After studying Barnabas’ example, what particular areas of your own life can you improve so that you can have a living and effective faith? Explain how you can improve.
Personal answers.