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### A New Leader for the Missionsary Movement

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## A NEW LEADER FOR THE MISSIONARY MOVEMENT

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS  
NUMBER 44  
ACTS 11:25-30

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This Scripture is very significant for it is the story of how the center of the Christian movement moved from the very legalistic church in Jerusalem to this glorious grace church in Antioch. So from Antioch not from Jerusalem would go the great missionaries out to the ends of the earth. A man named Barnabas was the inspired leader in this great mission expansion. The Jerusalem church became legalistic and their success was based on the things that man did. Thus the Jerusalem church became the center of legalism. Up at Antioch we have a group of people living by grace and from that great church, the missionary movement became a great force in the world. More powerful than the culture of Greece or the power of Rome was the force of this missionary message. Instead of religious clap trap the Antioch church stood on true doctrine and this was the spirit and greatness of this missionary church. Please notice that Barnabas didn't go to Antioch and try to make Jews out of them, but rather he went and encouraged them in learning doctrine. As a result, many people were added to the church. Grace resulted in a spirit of missions and a spirit of evangelism and conquest. A doctrinal decline was going on in Jerusalem and a doctrinal revival was going on in Antioch.

ACTS 11:25 "Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul" This verse is very significant in two ways. First, it is significant who Barnabas did not go to seek when he needed help in Antioch. He did not go to get Philip the Evangelist, or James the leader of the Jerusalem church, or Simon Peter the one who preached the sermons on the day of the Jewish Pentecost and the Gentile Pentecost. Second, it is significant that Barnabas went to Tarsus to seek out Saul. Barnabas was a great man, free from jealousy and pettiness, and he knows that Saul knows more doctrine than he does. So Barnabas goes to get Saul. If Barnabas had been a little man and filled with selfishness, he would never have gone for Saul. But Barnabas was relaxed and happy and he wanted the Antioch church to have the very best. So he struck out all on his own to find Saul. The word here "to seek" literally means "To search up and down". He didn't have Saul's address, didn't even have a zip code. So he searched up and down and back and forth until he found him. Barnabas was the first one to recognize that Saul of Tarsus was the twelfth apostle, and not Matthias the one the church chose. Barnabas also recognized the fact that Saul of Tarsus was the one God had chosen to be the apostle and missionary to the Gentile world. This in itself shows what a truly great man Barnabas was.

ACTS 11:26 "And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch." Between these two words--when he found him he brought him--there is one of the most important conversations in the history of the Christian movement. It is not recorded here, but Barnabas persuaded Saul that this was the leading of the Lord. The principle here is this--God always has appointments for his own workers. God's workers are called men. Possibly in their conversation Saul told Barnabas that Antioch was his task and that he should go back and lead them himself. But Barnabas persuaded him that he was needed and soon they were on their way back to Antioch. "A whole year" in this verse means 44 A.D. They spent a whole year in Bible study. The Jerusalem church is on the decline and the Antioch church is on the ascendancy. This is one of the greatest years in the history of Christianity. This is the year when Herod Agrippa died and when he died his son took the throne. This led to the decline of Jerusalem and her eventual overthrow. This was two years before the great famine in Palestine. God is preparing his headquarters, Antioch, for the missionary expansion. "Taught" here means that they taught them over and over and over. This Antioch church was well founded in doctrine and this always produces missionary activity. Bible teaching will

build a strong church anywhere and anytime. These people in Antioch were not hindered by tradition and prejudice and a legalistic background. So they were fertile ground for pure Bible doctrine.

Now we have come to a very interesting phrase--"Disciples were first called Christians in Antioch". Who was it that called them Christians? It was the unbelievers who called them Christians, and they called them Christians in derision. Christian is a hybrid word. First, it expresses Jewish thought. It comes from "Christ", which means the anointed one. Messiah is the Hebrew for the same word. So it expresses Jewish thought. But the word "Christian" is a Greek word and comes from the Greek noun "Christ". The suffix "ian" is Latin. So you have here a Jewish, Greek, and Latin word. The suffix "ian" means to belong to something. The believers called themselves "Believers", or "Followers" or "People of the way". But when someone wanted to ridicule and scoff at these believers, they called them "Christians". This word is used three times in the New Testament and each time it means "Belongers to Christ". It is used in Acts 26:28 in the mouth of Agrippa second in derision, and in 1 Peter 4:16 in persecution by the Romans. So this word was used in derision by Gentile enemies.

Now it is quite appropriate that we have Jewish, Roman, and Greek influence in this name for each of these nations was to contribute a great influence to Christianity. Antioch, the third largest city in the Roman Empire, was founded 300 B.C. by Seleucus Nicator in honor of Antiochus the Great and named Antioch. A beautiful river flowed through the city and this city survived until the 6th Century. One historian said of Antioch, "When I think of Antioch I think of a city where poets spend their youth, generals spend their old age, and emperors drop in for a fling".

ACTS 11:27 "And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch." Among the prophets in Antioch was a man named Agabus. He is mentioned again in Acts 21. He warned Paul not to return to Jerusalem. (Story is told in Acts 21) He put a binding on Paul and tied him up with it. It was something like a straight-jacket and told him that if he went to Jerusalem that this is the way the Jews would treat him. Agabus was exactly right and had it not been for the intervention of God, they would have killed Paul. But Paul was emotional about Jerusalem and all he could think of was the past and his student days there and he always wanted to go back there. Paul and a committee had taken up quite a large offering for the starving saints in Jerusalem and he wanted to go and take it to them. Paul went and took a vow in the temple and got in a lot of trouble and Roman soldiers saved his life. But God's grace used Paul in spite of his disobedience. In 46 A.D. there will be a great famine in Palestine and they took up money and provided food for them. This is grace in action. The Jerusalem church tried to ruin things in Antioch, as it is related in the book of Galatians. They tried to make the church in Antioch accept their Jewish ways and obey Roman dietary laws, etc. In other words, they tried to make Jews out of them. But Agabus instead is directed by the grace of God and leads in prophesying the coming famine. Here is the difference in legalism and grace. Notice that the people gave these gifts on the basis of their own character. This verse says that this came to pass during the rule of Claudius Caesar, which was 41 to 54 A.D. This famine is well documented in secular history.

ACTS 11:29-30 "Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea: Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul." Notice those words "every man according to his ability". This is the Christian basis of giving, with tithing as a minimum standard. Tithing is a good basis for beginning to give. No one should give a tenth on the basis of trying to bribe God to give something back. Give because you love God and believe in his cause and your gift is an investment in God's work. In 46 A.D. these Greek cities sent gifts to Jerusalem to care for these starving believers. The language here shows that they gave on a business-like basis. This is the application of doctrine to experience.

Verse 30 is the report of the culmination of this project. They sent the money by the hands of Barnabas and Saul. The grace believers in Antioch took an offering of money to the legalistic believers in Jerusalem. So the important thing as we close this 11th Chapter is this--the hallmark of the Jerusalem church was legalism and the hallmark of the Antioch church was grace. I think this was given here to remind us of the right way to give. Giving, if it is pleasing to God, must always be on the grace basis. It is my fervent prayer that more and more this will be the basis of our giving in this church.