

## I. THE SCATTERED DISCIPLES.

**Verse 19.** Our attention is first directed back to the "great persecution against the Church" which followed the murder of Stephen, and which had scattered abroad the believers. "All except the apostles" fled (Acts 8. 1). We are now told where they went, *as far as Phenice (Phœnicia), and Cyprus, and Antioch.* Wherever they went they proclaimed Jesus, but, having no conception of salvation outside of Moses's law, believing that the Messianic hope was for Hebrews only, they preached the word to none but unto the Jews. They had not yet learned what Peter had been divinely taught. This verse is a mere connective sentence in Luke's history; nevertheless, we may learn from it: (1) That persecution always helps the cause it opposes. (2) That the true believer in Christ cannot but proclaim the Gospel. He "preaches" in season and out of season, sometimes even when he himself little suspects it. (3) That the narrowness of the friends of the Gospel hinders its progress more than the opposition of its enemies. This is emphatically true in modern Christian life.

**20. And, "But." Men of Cyprus and Cyrene.** Men, like Paul, of "cosmopolitan education;" lifelong circumstances had led them to mix more freely with Gentiles than would have been possible in Palestine. Cyprus was a "Greek isle" and Cyrene an African city, in both of which resided many Jews. When they were come to Antioch they found there a company of Christian Hebrews, converts of those who had been "scattered abroad upon the persecution;" but, leaving these, they spake unto the Grecians [Greeks], preaching the Lord Jesus. Ordinarily in New Testament usage "Grecians" stands for foreign-born Jews and proselytes, while "Greeks" stands for heathen. These new hearers of the Gospel were heathen and Gentile. The teachers themselves were "Grecian" [foreign-born] Jews. It was most startlingly a new departure for them to preach to Gentiles.

**21. The hand of the Lord was with them.** A most beautiful figure of speech. He had guided their steps through all their journey, and, having impelled them to preach to sinners without regard to race or religion, now supported their endeavors. *A great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.* It requires no exceptional imagination to see certain unavoidable consequences of the conversion of this great number. The synagogue of Antioch, famous throughout the world for its wealth, dignity, and devotion, had doubtless been stirred

and troubled by the earlier conversion of many of its members, but now the whole city must have been aroused. These converts, Jews and Gentiles alike, were not merely "young and inexperienced Christians;" they had no Church precedents and little of Church organization to assist them in their devotions and their lives. There was every human probability of error and heresy in this first Gentile Church. But God's providence cared for them.

## II. BARNABAS AND SAUL.

**22. Tidings of these things** ["the report concerning them"] *came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem.* Very likely as a formal report, for the believers who had left Jerusalem still looked to the apostles and elders as their ecclesiastical superiors and spiritual guides. *They sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch.* "That he should go" is omitted from the Revised Version. The church at Jerusalem seems to have received the news from Antioch more placidly than the news from Cæsarea, but there is no intimation that the Jewish preachers of Antioch had shocked their coreligionists as Peter did when he abode in the house of Cornelius and ate with him. Barnabas was sent forth to supervise the work as Peter and John had been sent into Samaria. He may have been selected because he, too, was a "man of Cyprus."

**23. When he came, and had seen the grace of God.** When he had personally observed the genuineness of the work. *He was glad, and exhorted [comforted, stimulated] them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.* Certainly they needed "purpose of heart." They had begun right, but they had not yet felt the awful pressure of temptation and persecution. That it was difficult for a Hebrew to be a Christian the whole history of the apostolic Church down to this period shows, but the difficulties in the way of a convert from heathenism were immeasurably greater. That Barnabas had peculiar aptitude for the arduous task of confirming in the faith these enthusiastic but exposed converts is shown by the fact that he was "glad" rather than apprehensive. His prescription for growth in grace is an infallible one—a firm determination of soul to cleave unto the Lord.

**24. He was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith.** This is given as a reason for his breadth of view. "Good" means actively good, here and generally through the New Testament—good-doing. He was gracious and attractive. He had the other endowments of

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