

FOLLOWING INSTRUCTIONS

A LOOK AT THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Acts 9: 20 - 31

With these eleven verses, we come to end of the second major section of the book of Acts. Foundations are now laid for the next major advance of the gospel. Verse 31 includes the refrain, 'the church grew in numbers'.

The significance of this short section is not just that it completes the account of Paul's conversion and brings him back to Jerusalem, but that it introduces us to Barnabas. Without the support and encouragement of Barnabas, it may well have been the case that Paul would never have been accepted by the Christians in Jerusalem.

Barnabas' name means "Son of encouragement". It is here that he comes alongside Paul. Paul, of course, has been through an incredible transformation. But how will he be received in Jerusalem? Is he just a wolf in sheep's clothing? Understandably, the church was afraid of him, "not believing that he really was a disciple" (v.26). Paul was rebuffed. The leaders of the church refused to meet with him because they didn't trust him.

Put yourself in their shoes. Would you have trusted Paul? This was the man who had made it his mission to wipe out the church. He'd killed many, and was probably responsible for the death of many of the friends and co-workers of the church's leaders. They had attended too many funerals because of Paul. Now, Paul was a changed man, a redeemed man, but his past still cast a huge shadow over his life.

That's when Barnabas enters the story. "Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus." (Acts 9:27-28).

Barnabas put his reputation on the line to vouch for Paul! He introduced him to Peter and James, the brother of Jesus. Because of this intervention, Saul was welcomed into the fellowship of believers in Jerusalem. Barnabas appears several times in the book of Acts always in this role of encourager.

The word “encourage,” means to “put courage into”. The opposite of an encourager is a “dis-courager” (one who siphons courage from another). We draw energy from those who encourage and are worn out by those who discourage. Barnabas spurred others on. He’s an example for us. How badly we need ‘encouragers’ in the community of God’s people today.

So, because of Barnabas’ influence, Paul is now accepted and in post, all ready for his ministry to take off. The next section will see the good news spread into the Gentile world.