

# K.E.Y. Bible Study

**Description:** K.E.Y. Bible Study introduces the essential biblical narratives, concepts, and themes, and teaches the student how to apply the message of the Bible to daily living. Each teaching session is self-contained, which allows participants to join in the study at any time during the five years.

**Purpose:** To teach the most significant events, passages, and doctrines of the Bible in a manner and using methods which encourages and empowers the student to:  
Keep the faith that we have received  
Be Equipped to serve the Body of Christ  
Become Yoked, or connect, with others for the purpose of ministry

## A Model for Church Planting November 18, 2015 Acts 11:19-30

While we often think the church grows despite persecution, Luke shows that frequently the church grows because of persecution. In this passage we read how the church spread northward as the direct result of persecution. While Acts 9-13 describe the gospel being spread beyond racial and geographical lines through the personalities of Peter and Paul, the verses from this session tell us about God using the evangelistic activity of anonymous missionaries to plant churches. The church is no longer a movement empowered by well-known Jewish followers reaching other Jews. It is now the Spirit of God working in the lives of many ordinary people who are doing extraordinary things. Luke again used the word picture of a farmer scattering seeds to describe the preaching/speaking of the church.

### When

While it is not possible to give a specific date, these events most likely occurred between 42 A.D. and 48 A.D. Even though at one time the Emperor Claudius had been more accepting of the Jews, he eventually persecuted them and created problems for Christians. He saw the Christians as a sect of Judaism. Although cruel to the Christians, Claudius granted citizenship to the provinces, which allowed the Christians to move more freely throughout the expanded empire and expedited the spread of Christianity.

### Where

The historian Josephus called Antioch the “third city of the Empire” after Rome and Alexandria. It was very pluralistic and cosmopolitan with even an asian flavor. It is estimated that the population was over 500,000. The early church found that the pluralistic cities were tolerant, even receptive, to the gospel. It is important to remember that as our country becomes more pluralistic, we have more opportunities for evangelism.

You can find a map at: <https://www.ccel.org/bible/phillips/CN092MAPS1.htm>.

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## What Happened

### Acts 11:19

**Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews.**

- The word “scattered” is associated with planting seeds. In this passage, it is used to illustrate that God can use the political schemes of humanity, which are intended for evil, for divine and holy purposes. The stoning of Stephen was a defining moment for the early church. It marked the beginning of persecution and forced many Christians to exit Jerusalem.
- Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch had large Jewish populations. Syria, like Babylonia, was considered friendly territory for Jews in the first century. It is evident that most Christians still perceived their mission to be limited to the Jews.

### Acts 11:20-21

**20 Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. 21 The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.**

It is important to note that early Christians did not violently defend their faith or try to force the political structure to accept them. They were willing to leave and avoid confrontation rather than defend their rights. Intentional martyrdom was not a strategy of the early church. Those Christians who reached out to non-Jews were from areas that were outside traditional Palestine. Large numbers of non-Jews believed and turned to Jesus. Faith in Jesus always involves turning to Him and turning away from sin.

### Acts 11:22-24

**21 The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord. 22 News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. 23 When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. 24 He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.**

The Jewish Christians become concerned about the growth in Gentile Christianity, so they sent Barnabas to check it out. Because Barnabas was from Cyprus and had the reputation as an encourager, he would have been better received among both the Gentile Christians and the Hellenistic Jewish Christians in Antioch. Acts 11:24 is not just a description of Barnabas but also an explanation of why he was chosen for the mission.

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## **Acts 11:25-26a**

**25 Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, 26 and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people.**

Apparently Christian leaders helped Paul escape Jerusalem when Jewish leaders tried to kill him (see Acts 9:30). We do not know much about the time Paul spent in Tarsus, and sometimes these are called the “silent years” (see Galatians 1:21). Bringing Paul to Antioch was a brilliant, strategic stroke. Paul was a Roman citizen who understood both the Jewish and Gentile cultures, which would have been needed in Antioch. By bringing Paul to this major metropolitan area, Barnabas endorsed Paul. As a result, doors would be opened for Paul in the future. It is wrong to underestimate the role Barnabas played in the expansion of the early church.

## **Acts 11:26b**

**The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.**

Until this chapter, the disciples had been called “believers” (10:45), “saints” (9:13), and “followers of the Way” (9:2). This likely came from the unbelievers in the city, well known for their cleverness and nicknaming. It was probably used as a derogatory term first, but of course, it became the standard way of referring to Christ-followers.

## **Acts 11:27-30**

**27 During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) 29 The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea. 30 This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.**

The emphasis was on the Gentile Christians’ willingness to meet the needs of Jewish Christians so far away, not on Agabus’ prophecy regarding the famine. The term “disciples” does not refer to the twelve but to the Christian leaders in Antioch. Gentile Christians providing help to Jewish Christians in Judea could only strengthen Jewish-Gentile unity through Christ. (See also Romans 15:27: For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews’ spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings.)

## **K.E.Y. Application**

God’s plan for spreading His Word and His community is for Christians to invite all people with whom they come in contact to receive the good news of Jesus.

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