

Acts 11:19-30 ACTS-[27]-The ANTIOCH CHURCH

PRELIMS. Luke has been describing the spread of Xnity by Philip, Saul, Peter. The **central body** of the Church was at **Jerusalem**. That is where the NT Church HQ was! The Apostles were sent out from there to strengthen and review the work going on elsewhere. Peter/John to Samaria [8:14], Peter goes himself to report to Jerusalem [2], and now we find when there are believers at Antioch, the Church sends out Barnabas [22]! Let us now look at God's work at Antioch.

The CHURCH at ANTIOCH

Jesus had commanded His disciples to **begin** preaching the gospel at Jerusalem. **Then** take it to Samaria and Judea – and **then** to “*the ends of the earth*”[1:8]. **That** was their commission. We have already seen Peter's work in Jerusalem and Philip's ministry in Samaria and Peter in Lydda, Joppa, Caesarea, ie, the areas surrounding Jerusalem.

We now read that the believers who had scattered brought the gospel to **Phoenicia** (north west – present day Lebanon) the island of **Cyprus** and **Antioch** in **Syria** about 300 miles north west of Jerusalem (Dundee to Wick - by foot or camel!) There are about 16 Antiochs!

They were founded by one of Alexander the Great's generals, Nicator named cities after his father Antiochus! This one was the **third** largest city in the Empire after Rome and Alexandria. Pop: 300,000 to 500,000. Twice Dundee!! It was **cosmopolitan**/commerce/licentious with the Temple of Daphne! Called 'Antioch the Golden – Queen of the East'. The main street was 4 miles long, paved with **marble** and **marble colonnades!** The **only** city at that time with **street lights!** It was a city full of **interests** which **attracted** all classes of people!

The Church at Antioch was actually a very **famous** Church. Famous for the right things. It **took over** from the Jerusalem Church – because the Jerusalem Church did not **reach out** as commanded by the Lord. It did **not go** to the ends of the earth. It was **content** to stay in Palestine and the surrounding districts and not move out across the waters! It was **'afraid'** to move out of its **comfort zone!** It remained **inward looking!** Remember it was **afraid to accept Paul** in as a believer – it would not take risks! Quite happy to keep the **status quo?** It was still

blessed, it was still the centre of orthodoxy, but it lost its '**cutting edge**' as the driving force for the gospel in the world. It was destined for greater things but failed to be obedient to what Jesus had instructed it.

As a result it **lost** its role as the centre of activity. In fact you do not read of it again as a centre of Xn activity apart from a **geographical location** and **historical reference**. Like so many other cities in Scripture, Beersheba, Shiloh, Gilgal, etc it lost its glory. While it did retain its **official** and **historical significance** and a centre for administration, it was no longer the **hub** of spiritual **initiatives!**

The **Antioch** Church was the Church that made things happen in the world! It was the Church that sent **Paul** and Barnabas on the **first Missionary** journey! Antioch was the place to be if you wanted to be involved in the Church's **progress!** “*The Lord's hand was with them*”

TWO LESSONS

One. When the Church saw people, they **thought 'evangelism!'** They saw new people as **opportunities** for **evangelism!** Not only did they go where the **people** were, but when they saw **unbelievers** their **hearts** went out to them. Whereas the Jerusalem believers who were scattered abroad **only** spoke to the **Jews**, “*telling the message only to Jews*”[19], these Xns “*began to speak to the Greeks also telling them about the good news about the Lord Jesus*”[20] Beware of the Xnity that is not interested in people! The early Church were attracted to large populations of all nationalities and cultures!

Two. It was an **everybody ministry** – the blessing did not come from a pulpit based sermon! There was **no official leader** among them. We do **not** even know the **name** of any one of them! Probably no great preacher among them. No great charismatic personality, like Apollos! Was there a special formula? No! Just **ordinary people telling the Word!** Speaking, **not** 'preaching' as some versions, 'laleo'! **Speaking** the Word in normal conversation! Now I grant you this is a gift. But it is something we need to **pray** for – and then **nurture** it and **practice** it, just as we do in other disciplines like reading, studying, praying!

The **Result?** The Church **grew!** “*A great number of people believed and turned to the Lord*”[21] That is what we all want! It happened

because all the Xns were living good lives & taking every opportunity to talk of the Lord. It was an '**everybody ministry**' as Paul taught the Ephesians about the ministry "*to **prepare/equip** God's people for works of **service** so that the body of Christ may be **built up***" [Eph 4:12] (Of course there **is** a **particular** full-time 'teaching' ministry included!)

So the numbers grew and they **needed help!** They sent to Jerusalem – probably thinking of **Nicolas** the deacon who was from Antioch would be sent [6:6] but no! They man with the **biggest heart** – Barnabas!

BARNABAS

His name means **encourager**. And as his name is, so is his character. He helped them! "*a **good man and full of the Holy Spirit & faith***" [24]

Barnabas was an **extrovert** (it may even be that they were 'happy' to send him as he did not fit-in with their reserved **inward**-looking Spirit. His **enthusiasm/energy** for **mission** could be better employed there!)

Xns enthusiastic for the gospel, are **not critical** of people! Barnabas would very likely have found some things displeasing (pagans after all), yet he only had **good** things to report . He did not allow the 'negatives' to obscure "*the **evidence of the grace of God***" [23]. Note his immediate response. It was **not** 'Can they be true Xns? Have they really got the Holy Spirit within them?' Not **suspicious** - rather what he saw made him "***glad***" [23] Proceeded to **encourage** "*them all*" [23]

That is the real work of a pastor – to **encourage** and give **hope**. It is a ministry of **mercy!** The Church's work is **not to discourage** folk, or to break them down and take away any hope. The **reverse**. People **ought** to be **encouraged** when they leave church that there is hope for them!

Barnabas encouraged then to "*remain true to the Lord*" [23]. He was really speaking about **perseverance!** Perseverance in the **faith!** The Xn faith is **not** something you try for a period of time to see 'if it works!' Mr Baillie! It is a **faith** to live by – 'for better or for worse!' You don't stop trusting the Lord when things go wrong in your life – in fact that is when you trust God more and **discover** His support! If it was not for the bad times we would not know much of God's **grace!**

Now "*a **great number** of people were brought to the Lord*" [24] Gr=

'added' - to the Lord or the Church! So much so that they **needed help!** Barnabas knew the exact person for the job! **10yrs ago**, yes, 10yrs since Saul was shipped to Tarsus [9:30]! Barnabas must have known Saul had been called to the **Gentiles** [9:15]! Barnabas must have guessed that Saul was going to **outstrip** him and take over the **leadership** – yet that did not deter him from **seeking out** Saul!

APP You may be doing something today which will be of help to you, 10yrs from now! **God** works like that. The **whole** of our lives are **knit together** - but **years** can **separate events** which when 'connected' bring great blessing. Our whole lives are a **series** of connected events!

No wonder Paul wrote later "*All things work **together** for good to them that love God*" [Rom 8:28]! We do not know what he was doing these 10yrs, but are certain he was not wasting his time or moping about lost opportunities. He probably was evangelising! We know he preached in **Illyricum** [Rom 15:19] but no record of it in his travels – maybe during these 10yrs! They certainly were years of **preparation!**

Barnabas' Christlike Spirit probably **rubbed-off** on fellow Xns, thus "*called Christians **first at Antioch***" [26]! Antiochans(?) were full of **wit**, specially for name-calling. Called bearded **Emperor Julian 'The Goat'**! Good if **we** were given the same name – for the **same reason!**

PROPHECY and HELPING ONE ANOTHER

The gift of prophecy is **ethical** – it is not **occultic!** It is **not** to reveal that I have a gift. It is to **help** the hearers **prepare** for the future! It is God kindly telling us and **warning** us what lies ahead so that we can prepare! Its **moral** and **spiritual!** Its **God** wanting us to do the **right** thing – He is seeing us heading for danger and wanting us to turn!

Agabus prophesied a **famine** – so that believers could **help** one another "*the disciples, each according to his ability decided to provide **help** for the brothers living in Judea*" [29]! At one time Jerusalem helped other areas [Chaps 2 & 4] Now they receive help! **APP** I would like to think we could help Presbytery as they helped us for 25yrs!! **Prophecy for today?** Yes! People exercise it **without realising**. Eg. Over that cup of tea or in prayer, you may say something that was a help to someone - **without** you **planning** it!