

## 1945 - The ANTIOCH CHURCH - Acts 11:19-30

PRELIMS. Luke has been describing the spread of Xnity by Philip, Paul, Peter. Peter has gone to Cornelius' home and baptized several Gentiles at Caesarea! 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. 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've seen Peter's work in Jerusalem, Philip's in Samaria, Peter in Lydda, Joppa, Caesarea. Now in Antioch!!

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** (not Pisidia)! 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**! Very attractive!

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 as it should have. 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.

Result: it **lost** its role as the **centre of activity**. You don't read of it again as such, but only as a **geographical location** or a **historical reference**.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 hand of the Lord was with them* (21).

### 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**, *speaking the word to no one except Jews* (19), these Antioch Xns *spoke (laleo) to the Hellenists also* (Greek speaking non-Jews) *preaching (euaggelizo) the Lord Jesus* (20) Beware of the Xnity that is not interested in people! **APP** Dens Road application!!

**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 these Xn leaders who came to Antioch from Cyprus/Cyrene! Probably no great preacher like Apollos among them. No great charismatic personality! 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 who believed turned to the Lord* (21). That is what we all want! It happened because all the Xns were **living good lives** and taking every opportunity to **talk** of the **Lord**. It was an '**everybody ministry**' as Paul taught the Ephesians about the ministry *to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ* (Eph 4:12). As the numbers grew, they **needed help!** They sent to Jerusalem – for **a man with a big heart.....**

**BARNABAS** - means **encourager**. And as his name is, so is his character. He helped them! *a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith* (24) Barnabas was an **extrovert** (it may even be that they were 'happy' to send him to Antioch as he did not fit-in with their reserved **inward**-looking Spirit.

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 any 'negatives' to **obscure the grace of God** which he saw in them! (23). Note his immediate response. It was **not** 'Can they be real 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 them to **remain faithful 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!

Now *a great many of people were added to the Lord* (24) So much so that they **again 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 Saul was going to **outstrip** him and take over the **leadership** - yet that did not deter him! **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!

We do not know what Saul was doing these 10yrs, but are certain he was not wasting his time! We know he preached in **Illyricum** (Rom 15:19) but no record of when! Years of **preparation!**

Barnabas' Christlike Spirit probably **rubbed-off** on fellow Xns, thus *in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians* (26)! Antiochans(?) were full of **wit**, specially for name-calling. Called bearded **Emperor** Julian '**The Goat!**' Good if **we** were called Xns – 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 You 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!** Prophecy is **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 *so the disciples, determined, everyone according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea* (29)! At one time Jerusalem helped other areas [Chaps 2 & 4] Now they **receive** help! **APP** Some Africans and other foreigners come now to UK to evangelise us by way acknowledging how we brought the gospel to them!