

Acts 13:1-3 ACTS-[29]-SENDING OUT SAUL & BARNABUS

PRELIMS. The gospel has spread to the gentile world – and thus **great changes** were taking place in the Church! No change in the **gospel** but in the **administration** of the gospel there were necessary changes. Because the Jerusalem Church were slow to go to the 'ends of the earth' as Jesus instructed them, Antioch became the centre of Xn activity! Barnabas, Saul, John Mark are all there and the church is growing. There were still persecutions, James was martyred and Peter was imprisoned – and God removed King Herod! "*But the Word of God continued to increase and spread*" [12:24]. The Church must ever be evangelising!

The COMPOSITION of the CHURCH at ANTIOCH

We have all heard the term 'a mixed bunch'! Well the Church at Antioch had a mixed bunch of believers which was **lovely**! That is the way it ought to be. There is **no class distinction** amongst God's children. There was, is and ever shall be, **ethnic and cultural diversity** in the Church of God. At end of day **all** nations/kindreds will surround the throne and worship the Lamb of God. Even **before** the 1st missionary journey, there was **diversity**!

There was Barnabas – a **Cypriot**; Simeon – a black **African** called Niger (spelt differently from Simon who carried the Cross); Lucius of Cyrene, a **Lybian** (hope for Gadaffi!); Manaen a foster-brother of King Herod-Antipas who killed John Baptist - **royalty**! Quite a variety! And that was just among the **leadership**! And it was in **pagan** territory along the Mediteranean coast!

Variety – but of course their **faith, understanding, conviction** and **worship**, was all **Christian**! They all came to the same **belief** regarding **Jesus Christ** – who He is, and what He accomplished when He died on the Cross. The diversity referred only to their origin and background, **before** they came faith in Jesus Christ.

PROPHETS

Roles in the Church! Mention is made of "*prophets and teachers*". OT prophets were **different** from NT prophets! OT prophets spoke

the very words of God "*Thus saith the Lord...*". There was a **test** – if what you prophesied did **not** come to pass, the law stated you were to be **killed** as a **false prophet**! OT prophets were **infallible** when speaking authoritatively! OT prophets was an **office** appointed by God – **no self-appointments**!

The NT **equivalent** to prophets are **Apostles**! There is **no NT office** of prophet! Apostles spoke **authoritatively** and infallibly in the name of the Lord! This **change** of name for God's inspired spokesmen, came about because in the **Greek world**, the word '*prophetes*' has a much wider meaning and secular authors used it to refer to scholars who spoke **forth** a teaching or doctrine – sometimes from their own thoughts, or sometimes quoting someone else! Eg Titus 1:12 Paul quotes Greek **Poet** Epimenides re Cretans "*a prophet of their own*" obviously not referring to an OT prophet, a spokesman for God, but a teacher giving a lecture which was instructive and valueable and helpful.

In the Greek world, many writers outside the Bible used the word 'prophet' in this way – so in the NT, it is the word **Apostle** that is used to refer to those whom God appointed as His **official** spokesmen who spoke **authoritatively**.

In a sense, **all** Xns are NT prophets – for the word does **not** mean **forecasting** the future, but **forthtelling** the gospel! When Xns give good advice, either from experience, or study they are having the spirit of prophesy in **forthtelling** something good. But they are **not infallible**! That is why the Apostle Paul writes "*do not despise prophesying but test everything*" and then he adds "*hold fast what is good*" when you have tested it with Scripture [1 Thes 5:20]. Scripture is the final judge. Paul instructs the Cors re church order, "*Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said*"[1 Cor 14:29]! If NT prophets were infallible, Paul would never ask us to test them but to obey without question. We have the Word of God now to **judge** if God has spoken or not and if a 'prophesy' contradicts Scripture, reject it!

When some Xn says something that is most helpful (and Biblically

sound) at coffee time or in chatting that he did not intend to say before he came to church, then that often is God giving him the **spirit of revelation** as Paul prayed for the Ephs [1:17].

Prophetic speaking is **not** a dramatic/spectacular experience that stops the world in its course! **Most Xns** have spoken prophetically at one time or another. It is simply God bringing to your memory something you already heard and knew which is **relevant** to the occasion and it has been helpful to your brother/sister in Christ. It is of course always a 'Truth' consistent with God's Word.

NT prophesy not being an office, then women too could be used as a channel through whom God in His providence wants to convey some message to someone. Women in the NT prophesied Philip's daughters [21:9] and Paul instructs women who prophesied in [1 Cor 11:5]! It is **forthtelling** and always needs to be confirmed and tested – as we do with everything we hear/read! Even ministers!

TEACHERS

Teaching is the gift of **explaining the Scriptures** and **applying** it to people's lives! Teaching (Scripture) and preaching go together. NT teachers **must apply** the Word for they are much more than lecturers/informers! They **appeal** to people to believe! NT teaching is **distinct** from **prophesying** and is far from conveying a **spontaneous thought** that **suddenly** entered the mind, to an audience for their **consideration**. NT teaching is based on the solid Word of God and explained to all and sundry! Rather than to be considered/examined, it is to be **accepted/received/believed**!

Teachers 'set out' the **facts** concerning Jesus. He **was a historical** figure and He taught doctrines! Teachers then must **address the conscience** and ask for a **response**! The facts of His birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension and His teachings must be presented in a **relevant** way so that the **significance** of it is **felt in the heart**! A sermon that does not **arrest** the conscience and **challenge** the mind is only information! Having been told that Jesus died for sinners and that you are a sinner – a **response** of some kind is **unavoidable**! There **is** an inevitable, 'so what'? It means that

Jesus/Apostles were either **lying**, or telling the Truth – and that **means** we must **believe** their message and **respond** appropriately, or **reject** it all as untrue! So, what **does it mean** for you?

SENDING SAUL & BARNABAS

When does God most often speak? When we're **worshipping** Him! "*While they were worshipping the Lord*"[2]! I think the Antioch Church really **wanted** to know something from God! Maybe they had a 'hunch', a **prophesy** that they ought to send missionaries abroad - so they inquired of God. But they did not only pray, they did something else, something forgotten – they **fasted**! Fasting was done for a **particular reason**! For something **special/important**!

Fasting is all over the Bible, OT and NT. Our Confession speaks of it as something that is still to be done. When did **you** last fast? Have you **ever** fasted? Have we **lost** the **convction** that God answers prayer? Have we **lost** our **earnestness** and **concern** for X's Cause, so that we never even **think** of fasting to **demonstrate** our **genuine desire** for His glory and will to be known?

That something 'special' for which the Antioch Church fasted, may well have been whether they should part with the **two best** men they ever had – Barnabas and Saul!! How **unselfish** of them to be **willing** to part with their two best men in order for Gentiles to get the gospel! There is no word here of Saul/Barnabas **volunteering**, although I think both of them had the 'wander lust'! In fact, some churches believe there is **no warrant** in Scripture for candidates **offering themselves** for ministry and that the Church always chose, selected, 'sent out' those **they** deemed most suited! In other words, no **self-appointments** – always a **plurality** of elders!

In whatever way the idea originated, the Church certainly got **clear confirmation** about God's will, for the "*Holy Spirit said 'Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them'*"[2]. Notice: service in the Church **is a calling**! And in **every** calling there is always **human cooperation** – or human **rejection**! Every time you are in Church, God **calls you** to something? And you cooperate or you resist! Are you resisting or cooperating now!