

## **A Thriving Church Takes Root in Antioch, Part II**

**Text:** Acts 11:19-30

### **Introduction:**

Last time, we began to consider how, following the persecution that had arisen when Stephen was martyred, a church began to flourish in Antioch. For, some of the dispersed Jews from Cyrene (in North Africa) and the island of Cyprus, had begun to preach Christ to Hellenists (Greek Gentiles) in Antioch, and "the hand of the Lord was with them." And so, many were being saved. Word of this great work of the Spirit, had come back to Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas, the great encourager, to investigate and to help establish the work that God was doing there. Seeing the great work of grace taking place there, Barnabas was glad, and he encouraged them to continue to walk with the Lord, with purpose of heart.

Last time, we finished working through verses 19-23. And so, this morning, we will continue on, beginning with verse 24, seeking to work forward, to the end of the chapter.

### **I. Barnabas Enlists Saul's Help**

"For [Barnabas] was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith..." [Like Stephen and Philip, Barnabas was a spiritually energized man, with his back facing the world, jealous for, and consumed with Christ!]. "And a great many people were added to the Lord" (vs. 24). God was blessing this work, and He was blessing Barnabas's efforts, and more and more souls were being saved, and added to the Lord and His church!

"Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul" (vs. 25).

As the church at Antioch began to significantly grow, Barnabas knew that help was needed, in the work of discipling these newborn brethren. And so, he knew of one particular man, who would be greatly suited, to help in this regard. He remembered a young and energetic Saul, who had fearlessly preached the Gospel, almost to his own destruction, back at Jerusalem. And so, he travels North and West to Tarsus (some 85 miles or so) to find Saul. And this is how Saul/Paul makes his way back into the scene of Biblical history. And he will be a prominent figure, throughout the rest of Acts, as God continues to break Gospel ground, in the Gentile regions of the world. But first, he will spend a year preaching/teaching and getting established in Antioch, which will be his sending church.

"And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians at Antioch" (vs. 26).

Before God (by the church at Antioch), sent Paul and Barnabas out on their first missionary journey, he established them, and groomed them further at Antioch. And, in keeping with the biblical pattern for sending out missionaries, God would later have them sent *by the church!* In the meantime, they are used here at Antioch, to teach a great many people. [Notice, the fulfillment of the Great Commission taking place here---Matt. 28:18ff; Evangelism -> unto baptism -> unto teaching, sanctification and growth]

And here, for the first time, the term "Christian" is coined...by whom, we know not. We just know that the disciples were first called Christians, here at Antioch. More than likely, this served to draw a line of distinction between the religion of Christ, and the continuing opposing religion of Judaism. [See also Acts 26:28 & 1 Peter 4:16 Vs. Mark 3:6; 12:13; Matt. 22:16].

## **II. Strengthened Fellowship Through Hardship**

"And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch" (vs. 27).

Again, we find the church at Jerusalem, serving and helping the fledgling church at Antioch. First, they sent the treasured asset of Barnabas, to strengthen and encourage their faith. And here, we find that prophets also traveled from Jerusalem to Antioch, as well. Like the Apostles, prophets were precious gifts, given by God to the church. And furthermore, they were part of the foundation of the church. [See Ephesians 2:19-22 & 4:11ff].

Here, we find the more mature church at Jerusalem, generously sharing their precious spiritual resources, with the young church at Antioch. What a precious example of an "outward" focused church, who was concerned not merely for her own spiritual growth, but also for the spiritual growth of other local churches. And herein, we find the Biblical warrant for inter-church fellowship. God designed churches to congregate and worship locally, but he also designed churches to have fellowship with other like minded churches, so as to strengthen the faith of the whole body, while reminding us, that our heavenly fellowship is far broader than the spacial/language limitations, which presently exist. While we ought never to minimize the importance of being a part of a local church, we also ought never to lose sight of the ultimate global focus of Christ's universal church. And so, we find here, biblical support for ARBCA, the

association of which we are a part. [Missions support, financial support, prayer support, IRBS...etc]. And furthermore, as we will see in a moment, God reciprocates the blessing back from Antioch to Judea (though from a material standpoint), by use of a God-ordained famine.

"The one of them [the prophets], named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar" (vs. 28).

And so, here we are told that one of the prophets, who went from Jerusalem to Antioch, named Agabus, prophesied about a coming worldwide famine. The Spirit revealed this truth to him. Right off the bat, we can note again, both, by what we know about God in general, and by the way in which this truth is revealed, that this famine, was ordained by God. Indeed, God ordains His church to face both prosperity and hardship. And both are for her good! [Note: Philippians 4:10-14; Like the Apostle Paul, the church will, at times, face fluctuating times of hardship, along with times of prosperity]

This famine, in part, will be used to strengthen the fellowship and solidarity that exists between the church at Antioch, and the brethren in Judea. It will put the Jerusalem church in a state of dependence upon the church at Antioch, providing the church at Antioch with a great opportunity for growing in grace, and for extending love back to the brethren in Judea. In this way, the fellowship between the churches will grow stronger, and that, in a mutually dependent way!

Claudius Caesar reigned as the 4th emperor of the Roman Empire, from AD41-AD54. In AD45, because of a major flooding of the Nile River, the Egyptian harvest was damaged and reduced, and this caused grain prices to skyrocket for a time. And while this famine was worldwide, it is also historically known that from 46-48AD, a severe famine struck Judea in particular. And so, God would open up a door of increased fellowship; a tightening together of the heart strings, as it were, between the churches, by this means.

"Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul" (vs. 29-30).

And so, the brethren gave, each according to their ability. [See also Romans 15:25-28; 2 Cor. 9 --Context involves giving in excess to other church needs, not tithing option for the local church].

And so, Barnabas and Saul carried this gift to the brethren in Judea.

[Note the importance of seeing our bond with all true churches, as fixed and cemented by our unity in Christ! This flies right in the face of ethnic and nationalistic loyalties. There is one culture in Christ!]

AMEN!!!