

## The Gospel Comes To Antioch.

Acts 11:19-26.

Sunday morning, June 20, 2010.

### I. The city of Antioch.

- A. This was Antioch in Syria, located near the border with modern Turkey, and just south of the Northeast corner of the Mediterranean Sea. There was another Antioch in Asia Minor.
- B. Antioch in Syria was the third major city of the Roman Empire of that day, just behind Rome and the city of Alexandria in Egypt.
- C. Antioch in Syria was a city that functioned not unlike our St Louis in the 1800's, which was a staging area for settlers heading to points West of the Mississippi River. Antioch was a staging area for travelers heading East. They could get from Rome by boat to Antioch, but from there all travel to points East was over land; the Roman empire's trade routes stretched East as far as today's India.

### II. The gospel comes to Antioch. Vs. 19-21.

- A. Once again Luke directs our attention to the vehicle that drove the spread of the gospel. It was the persecution that arose following the death of Stephen in Jerusalem which scattered the believers in all directions, and with them the gospel was scattered like seed all over the region..
- B. Some of them followed the coastal route heading North, through Phoenicia, which is the coastal region of today's Lebanon and Syria. Some of them crossed over from there to Cyprus, located some 90 miles off shore in the Northeastern Mediterranean Sea. Others pressed North until they reached the city of Antioch.
- C. What they all had in common was that they spoke the gospel only to Jews. Our text says that they went "preaching the word to no one but the Jews only." No doubt this reflects their understanding up to this point that believing in Jesus as the Messiah was part and parcel of the Jewish faith.
- D. But change was in the air. There were a few of those who had been dispersed from Jerusalem who originally were from Cyprus and Cyrene (in North Africa). They were familiar with the Greek culture and felt at home among the gentile people. They were the first to be moved to speak of Jesus to the Greeks (Hellenists).

What moved these Jews to speak the gospel to these Gentiles? It certainly was against their culture and customs to do so.

There are reasons to think that Peter's encounter with Cornelius preceded these events in Antioch, and that word of the Holy Spirit being given to the Gentiles had reached Antioch even as it did Jerusalem.

  1. Luke, in recording the gospel's progress toward the gentile people, records the events surrounding Peter and his encounter with Cornelius first, and he presents it as a definitive event; an event that officially opened the door of the gospel to the Gentiles without the need for the Gentiles to become Jewish.
  2. When word reaches Jerusalem about the large numbers of gentiles coming to faith in the Lord, they do not send Peter or any other apostle to Antioch to address this issue, but they send the compassionate and gentle Barnabas.

3. When Jerusalem hears about large numbers of Gentiles turning to the Lord in Antioch there is no concern or outrage over this as there had been when Peter brought the gospel to Cornelius. All indications are that this issue was already settled in Jerusalem just as Acts 11:18 indicates.

### III. Barnabas goes to Antioch. Vs. 22

Why Barnabas? Who was he anyway?

- A. Barnabas belonged to the Jews who had lived in the dispersion. He grew up in the Greek culture of the island nation of Cyprus. He was a Levite, tracing his ancestry back to the tribe of Levi who served the tabernacle and temple and had no other inheritance in the land of Israel. The Lord himself was their inheritance.
- B. The circumstances of his conversion are unclear. It may be that he was in Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was given, and at that time came under the hearing of the gospel.
- C. Barnabas sold the land he owned and gave the proceeds to the apostles to be used in ministering to the Lord's needy people. Acts 4:36,37. His name had been Joses or Joseph, but in the church of Jerusalem he became known as Barnabas, or "Son of Encouragement."
- D. Barnabas was the first to receive Saul after his conversion into the circle of the disciples, and he introduced him to Peter, convincing Peter of the genuineness of Saul's conversion.
- E. He was a man full of the Holy Spirit and of faith, manifesting itself in compassion toward the Lord's people.
- F. No doubt he was sent because he was well qualified by way of his background in Cyprus. He was well qualified spiritually being full of the Holy Spirit and faith. And he was sent instead of an apostle because the issue of the Gentiles coming into the church had already been settled in the Jerusalem church..

### IV. The ministry in Antioch. Vs. 24-26.

- A. It grew quickly too large for Barnabas to handle, so he goes to Tarsus to look for Saul. Note how the Lord had His own way and time to bring Saul back into the ministry. Together they teach a great many people in Antioch.
- B. Something else happens in Antioch at this time which is a further indication that "the continental divide" of redemptive history had been crossed. The disciples were no longer seen as Jews (perhaps because of the large number of gentiles in their midst), and they are called Christians for the first time (by outsiders).

### V. The ministry in Antioch summarized. Vs. 23.

- A. With purpose of heart they should cling to the Lord. The word cling is only used in other places for "a man clinging to, or joining himself, to his wife." Eph. 5:31.
- B. The purpose of heart speaks to the conviction that there is no other source of virtue and of life; of peace and of joy; of rest and of restoration; of hope and of a future, but that it is Jesus alone, and that He is enough.  
Have you come to this conviction? Have you told the Lord? And have you told the Lord's Church by way of a public profession of faith?