

ACTS 11.19-30

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ANTIOCH

- ▶ Located 300 miles north of Jerusalem
- ▶ Capital of the Roman province of Syria
- ▶ Third largest city in the Roman Empire after Rome and Alexandria
- ▶ Known as the “Queen of the East” it was strategically located at the crossroads of trade and commerce for the Roman Empire
- ▶ Mid-first century population of 500,000, dominated by the Roman, Greek, Semitic, Arab, and Persian cultures
- ▶ A sports-dominated culture, famous for its chariot races
- ▶ Also a pleasure obsessed culture
- ▶ Particularly known for the “Gardens of Daphne”
- ▶ The pursuit of the god, Apollo, of the mortal, Daphne, was daily reenacted by those worshippers at the gardens and the temple prostitutes
- ▶ “The morals of Daphne” was a common euphemism throughout the empire for the scandalous, immoral, sexualized behavior that characterized Antioch and its pagan worship

*It was in this environment that
“the disciples were called ‘Christians’
first at Antioch.”*

THE GOSPEL COMES TO ANTIOCH

- ▶ Scattered by the persecution after the killing of Stephen, fugitive disciples went north from Jerusalem, sharing the gospel in Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch
- ▶ Most of them shared the gospel only with Jews
- ▶ Some of them, however, Jews from Cyrene (in modern Libya) and Cyprus, also came to Antioch, and proclaimed (evangelizo) the gospel of the Lord Jesus to the Greeks (non-Jews) living there (*Remember that the church at Jerusalem had just come to the understanding that the gospel was also intended for the Gentiles.*)
- ▶ Why did these Jews from Cyrene and Cyprus have such an “outside the Old Covenant” perspective? I believe that, by insight from the Holy Spirit, they understood the heart and intent that the Lord had articulated centuries earlier.

Let no foreigner who is bound to the LORD say, “The LORD will surely exclude me from His people.”

And let no eunuch complain, “I am only a dry tree.”

For this is what the LORD says:

“To the eunuchs who keep My Sabbaths,

who choose what pleases Me and hold fast to My covenant—

to them I will give within My temple and its walls

a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters;

I will give them an everlasting name that will endure forever.

And foreigners who bind themselves to the LORD to minister to Him,

to love the name of the LORD, and to be His servants,

all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to My covenant—

these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in My house of prayer.

Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on My altar;

for My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.”

HOW COULD THIS PROPHECY BE FULFILLED?

- ▶ Deuteronomy 23.1 barred eunuchs from public worship with God's people
- ▶ Isaiah 52.1 declared that *"The uncircumcised and defiled will not enter you [Jerusalem] again."*
- ▶ A eunuch could do nothing to change his state. This prophecy could only be fulfilled—
if God changed the conditions and the terms.

- ▶ Years later, the Apostle Paul would write—

*A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is **circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit**, not by the written code. Such a person's praise is not from other people, but from God.*

—Romans 2.28-29

For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh.

—Philippians 3.3

In Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through your faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; He has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.

—Colossians 2.11-14

- ▶ I believe that, through insight from the Holy Spirit, these evangelists in Antioch understood the heart and intent that the Lord had articulated centuries earlier: a new order and covenant, with new conditions and terms, was now in place—*“believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved”*—and that it truly included everyone.

THE GOSPEL IS RECEIVED

- ▶ “The Lord’s hand was with them”

My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God’s power.

—1 Corinthians 2.4-5

For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction.

—1 Thessalonians 1.4-5

- ▶ The result: “a great number of people believed”

BARNABAS ARRIVES AND ENCOURAGES THE MISSION

- ▶ The apostles at Jerusalem chose Barnabas to oversee the mission at Antioch
- ▶ Why Barnabas?
 - ▶ He was from Cyprus as were those evangelizing in Antioch
 - ▶ He was known for his demeanor and ministry of encouragement
 - ▶ He was "a good man, full of faith and the Holy Spirit"
- ▶ He saw the evidence of the grace of God at work in a non-Jewish pagan culture
- ▶ He encouraged the new disciples to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts
- ▶ Under his encouraging oversight, many more were brought to the Lord

BARNABAS BRINGS SAUL TO PARTNER WITH HIM

- ▶ Barnabas “went to Tarsus to look for Saul and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch.”
- ▶ What has Saul been doing during this time? Pursuing Jesus to the loss of all things; gaining revelation that would characterize his letters and ministry.

I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows— was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell.

—2 Corinthians 12.2-4

- ▶ Together they ministered for for the next year to the assembled church, teaching great numbers of people—the doctrine of the apostles, the way of following Christ.

THE APOSTLES CREED

I believe in God the Father Almighty
Maker of heaven and earth.
And in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord
Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit
Born of the Virgin Mary,
Suffered under Pontius Pilate
Was crucified, dead, and buried
He descended into hell
The third day He rose again from the dead
He ascended into Heaven
And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty
From there He shall come to judge the living and the dead
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
The Christian Church,
The communion of saints,
The forgiveness of sins,
The resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen.

A NEW IDENTIFICATION

“The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.”

- ▶ “Christianos” - follower of Christ
 - ▶ “Christos” - anointed, the Christ
- ▶ In this account, there are five characteristics of a Christ-follower. Are they true of you?
 - (1) A Christ-follower turns from his own way and seeks forgiveness of sin (v.21)
 - (2) A Christ-follower surrenders her life to Christ as Lord (v. 21)
 - (3) A Christ-follower conspicuously joins with other disciples (v. 26)
 - (4) A Christ-follower pursues a knowledge of Christ (v. 26)
 - (5) A Christ-follower lives a life of selfless, generous love for others (vss. 29-30)