

Visiting Antioch

The church in Antioch is often overlooked. It is largely unknown and discussed. That could be because no letter is written to it in the New Testament. We don't find an inspired writer praising or telling us about problems in this church.

And yet, this is one of the most important churches in the Bible. It is the church where God's people were first called "Christians" (Acts 11:26). This fact alone makes this church worthy of study.

The church was started due to the great persecution (Acts 11:19-21; Acts 8:1-4). After being forced out of Jerusalem, some disciples traveled north to Antioch of Syria. They preached the gospel to the Jews, and some began preaching to Gentiles.

The news of people being converted in Antioch eventually reached "the ears of the church at Jerusalem" (Acts 11:22). Barnabas was sent to Antioch to encourage the brethren. He soon left to retrieve Saul of Tarsus, and they worked with the church for a year (Acts 11:23-26).

What was Barnabas able to witness in Antioch?

Growth

- The church in Antioch was a growing and thriving church. Many people in the city believed and turned to the Lord (Acts 11:21).
- The Jerusalem church also experienced rapid growth (Acts 2:41, 47; 4:4). While Jerusalem was considered a holy city because it housed the temple, Antioch was different.
- Antioch was the third most populous city in the Roman Empire. It was a wealthy, growing metropolis. It had palaces, an Amphitheater, hippodrome, and was immaculate.
- Despite being immersed in idolatry and immorality, the gospel thrived in Antioch. The disciples converted people through simple and powerful preaching from the gospel (Acts 11:24).
- The Antioch church proves churches can grow and prosper in the big city!

Generosity

- Antioch was involved in the work of benevolence (Acts 11:27-30). They sent relief to brethren in Jerusalem during a time of famine.
- Even though the church was comprised mainly of Gentiles, they were determined to help their Jewish brethren. They sent the money from Barnabas and Saul to the elders of the church.
- What can we learn from their example?
 - The Lord's money can be used for the benevolent needs of brethren (Acts 11:29; 1 Corinthians 16:1-3). The church in Antioch didn't use its funds to feed the world.
 - There is a model for distributing benevolence to another church (Acts 11:30).

Diversity

- Disciples in Antioch preached the gospel to "Greeks" (Acts 11:19-21).
- People from all races and backgrounds were part of this church (Acts 13:1-3).
- The diversity in this church testified to the power of the gospel! It proves there is no place for racism and segregation in the Lord's church. The focus should be on people's souls and faith in Christ, not the color of people's skin.
- Disciples were first called "Christians" in a racially mixed church.

Acceptance

- This church accepted Saul into their fellowship despite his past as a persecutor of the church (Acts 11:25-26). The brethren allowed Saul to work and grow into the great Apostle Paul.

- Paul would one day launch out from Antioch on preaching journeys.
- By accepting Saul, the church in Antioch demonstrated love, compassion, and hearts like Jesus.
- Let us continue striving to be a church where all disciples can grow and develop in their service to God.

Conclusion:

Like those in Antioch, are you also a Christian?

- Shawn Jeffries