

THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

LESSON FOUR = The Church in Antioch
Bible Class Series by Ray Reynolds (1/5/11)

Introduction: Each of the congregations in the New Testament had unique features and characteristics. They all had qualities we can learn from and use to better our own congregations today. In this lesson we are going to consider the church in Antioch. Let's study together

Discussion:

I. The Geography of Antioch

Antioch of Syria was the third most important city in the Roman Empire (Rome, Alexandria). Antioch was the center of cultural and commercial life in the eastern Mediterranean world. The seaport of Seleucia is located there on the mouth of the Orontes River. It was part of a major trade route between Asia Minor and Palestine (as early as 300 BC). It was also the location of a military headquarters for the Roman army (*Pax Romana*).

II. The History of Antioch

The city of Antioch is traditionally known as the hometown of doctor Luke (writer of Luke, Acts). Paul visited this city often during his missionary journeys to visit Greeks, Syrians, and Jews. The Jews had equal rights with the Greeks (**Acts 11:12, 15:9, Romans 3:22, 10:12, Galatians 3:28**). Religiously speaking, you could find every just about everything you were looking for in Antioch.

III. The Beginning of the Church in Antioch

The movement into Antioch by Christians came after the persecution of Saul (**Acts 8:1, Acts 11:9**). After Stephen's speech, and martyrdom, the disciples fled to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch. The Christians who probably suffered the hardest were the Hellenists (Greek-speaking Jews, **Acts 6**). The Hellenistic proselytes were easier targets (Stephen, Philip, Nicolaus of Antioch, etc.). Cornelius might not be the first Gentile convert, just the first one recorded in the Bible. Luke followed things geographically not chronologically (**Acts 1:8, Acts 11:9**).

IV. The Work of the Church in Antioch

Paul began preaching in Syria, Arabia, and Cilicia (**Galatians 1:17, 21, 2:1**). The church had already been recognized as being disciples (**Acts 6:1**), the Way (**Acts 9:2**), brethren (**Acts 14:2**), believers (**Acts 16:1**), and saints (**Philippians 1:1**) among other names. In Antioch they were first called Christians (**Acts 11:26 - Acts 26:28** and **I Peter 4:16**). They had many prophets and teachers in Antioch (**Acts 13:1-2, I Corinthians 12**).

- * The Holy Spirit moved the prophets to travel from city to city (**Acts 11:27-28, 21:10**).
- * Agabus in **Acts 11:27-28, 21:10** had this distinction (Simeon, Lucius, Manaen, Paul, Barnabas).

The teachers stayed in Antioch to edify the brethren (**Ephesians 4:11-12, I Thessalonians 5:12-22**). They believed in mission work and supported many missionaries (**Acts 11, 12, 13, 19**).

- * The two most famous missionaries were Paul and Barnabas (**Acts 19:22, II Corinthians 12:18**).

We see unique practices like ordination ceremonies, prayer, fasting, and laying on of hands.

- * These things didn't give them any more authority, but a blessing and edification.

V. *The Teachings of the Church in Antioch*

The congregation taught and practiced love and respect for each other.

- * This is evident in the spirit of Paul and Barnabas (**Acts 13:9-13**).
- * Paul took a back seat to Barnabas because he funded the work (**Acts 4:36, 11:22-26, 12:2, 7**).
- * Remember that Joseph, called Barnabas - the son of encouragement, was a Hellenist from the island of Cyprus (**Acts 4:36**).
- * He believed in benevolence and encouraging those that are rejected (Luke, Paul, John Mark).
- * Also, don't forget that it was Barnabas who went to get Paul and bring him into the ministry.

The congregation taught and practiced equality among the brethren.

- * They saw the hand of God with the Jews and Gentiles (**Acts 14:27, Ephesians 2:11-16**).
- * They understood that God alone can do the saving and the judging.
- * This spirit was not readily received by the other churches (still not today).

The congregation taught and practiced benevolence.

- * This church personally funded many of the world-wide missions in the first century.
- * On one occasion, Agabus visited telling them about the needs of the Jerusalem church in a famine and they were quick to take support (**Acts 11:27-30**). Guess who took it?
- * This demonstrated the attitude of the loving and giving atmosphere in Antioch.
- * Even though they received personal visits and monetary donations, the Jerusalem church continues to have conflict with these brethren through chapter 15.

VI. *The Dilemmas of the Church in Antioch*

There were personality conflicts with other congregations.

There were racial divides and prejudice issues with other congregations.

There were fellowship issues within the church and with the other congregations.

- * It was in Antioch where Paul and Peter had the verbal confrontation (**Galatians 2:12, Acts 11:30**).
- * James, the brother of Jesus, was guilty of the same but he offers good advice (**Acts 15:29**).

There were leadership issues within the congregation.

- * Paul, Barnabas, Silas, John Mark, and visiting preachers like Peter and James.

VII. *The Maturity of the Church in Antioch*

The brethren resolved their issues in an exemplary fashion.

The brethren understood the need to break down barriers.

The brethren successfully upheld the Great Commission.

The brethren should be revered despite their virtual anonymity.

Conclusion: God clearly blessed the church in Antioch. We can see that history shows the wisdom and providence of God throughout the New Testament. We should trust Him to provide direction for the church today. It is my prayer that by studying about these wonderful congregations of the Lord's people that we will see our place in the kingdom. Next week we will study about the church in Philippi.