

The Church at Antioch

The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.—Acts 11:21

Except for Jerusalem, the city of Antioch in Syria was the most important city in the history of the early church. The gospel message brought there found many “hearing ears” among the Gentiles. It was at Antioch that the followers of Jesus were first called Christians (Acts 11:26).

The Antioch church had simple arrangements, much like those practiced by Jesus and the apostles. They met to grow in knowledge, fellowship, and to help each other in the Christian way. They helped send missionaries to other cities. Paul started his first and second missionary journeys from Antioch. His third journey also started there but ended with his imprisonment in Jerusalem.

When the brethren at Jerusalem heard of the growing number of believers at Antioch, they were delighted. Earlier, at the stoning of Stephen, some of Jesus' followers escaped to Antioch and there they taught the people about Jesus and the wonderful plan of God.

Barnabas was a good and faithful minister to the church at Antioch. He was a native of Cyprus, an island in the Mediterranean Sea; he was a Levite and well-learned in the law. The name Barnabas means *son of consolation* or *helper*. He was a kind and loving comforter who helped teach the new Christians. There were so many who were hungry for more knowledge of the plan of redemption that Barnabas sent for the apostle Paul, the best teacher he knew (Acts 13:1-3; 15:36).

Paul and Barnabas were loved and respected by the Antioch brethren. The Jews, however, hated and persecuted them. Not long after this, terrible persecutions were directed upon the Christians by the Roman emperors who took pleasure in doing such things just to relieve their boredom!

God permitted these evil things to come upon the church to test their faith and loyalty to him. Such experiences are needed by those who follow Jesus so that their characters can be developed.

The experiences of the church throughout the Gospel age often have been extremely cruel and difficult, coming in many different forms. These experiences also help the church become sympathetic with all who have gone through trying and difficult experiences. It will give the church an understanding of and compassion for everyone in the next age.



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