

## THE MISSIONARIES OF ANTIOCH

– *MAY 7. – ACTS 11:19-26; 13:1-3. –*

PERSECUTION SPREADS THE GOSPEL – THE FIRST CHURCH AMONGST THE GENTILES – BARNABAS SENT FROM JERUSALEM TO ASSIST THE YOUNG CHURCH – SAUL OF TARSUS BROUGHT TO ANTIOCH – THE TWO BRETHREN SENT FORTH AS MISSIONARIES – ORDINATION AND LAYING ON OF HANDS.

**"Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations."**

**– Matthew 28:19. R.V.**

ANTIOCH, at the time of our Study, was the third city in the world both in commercial importance and in population, only Rome and Alexandria taking precedence. It is noted as being the first city outside of Palestine in which a Christian Church assembly was formed. Indeed, we might say that as Jerusalem was the center of influence in Palestine, so Antioch became a center of influence as respected the Gospel amongst the Gentiles.

It seems that the little spark of Truth which started the work of the Lord at Antioch resulted from the persecution which arose at the time of St. Stephen's death. Some of those forced out of Jerusalem by the persecution settled at Antioch; and of course they could not walk in the light of the Gospel without letting the light shine out for others. At first this was done only toward those who were of the Jewish faith; and in a large commercial center such as Antioch there were sure to be large numbers of Jews. We know not how many of them were reached with the Gospel; but it was surely confined to them until the end of Israel's seventy symbolical weeks of Divine favor – until the autumn of 36 A.D.

At the same time that the Lord was sending Deacon Philip to the Samaritans and to the Ethiopian eunuch, and the opening the door to the Gentiles through the Apostle Peter, He was ready to open the door to the Gentiles everywhere. Under the leadings of Divine providence some of the Christian Hebrews got the proper thought at the proper time – that a Gentile who would receive the Lord Jesus could be classed as a disciple equally with the Jews who had done so. The work thus started amongst the Gentiles at Antioch spread considerably, the Gentiles seeming to take more notice of the Gospel than had the Jews to whom it was first preached.

### **BARNABAS SENT TO ANTIOCH**

The news that the Gospel had gone to the Gentiles at Antioch, and that large numbers were turning to the Lord, reached the Church at Jerusalem – the head-center of the Christian work, so to speak. The Apostles and all the brethren had been prepared by the Lord's manifest dealing in the case of Cornelius, the Roman centurion; and this undoubtedly would detract from their surprise and would largely correct any prejudice on the subject of the Gentiles as fellow-heirs of the Abrahamic Promise, which had previously pertained to the Jews alone. Nevertheless, we note that the record does not say that this news caused rejoicing in the Church at Jerusalem. We may infer, therefore, that they heard with considerable trepidation that large numbers of Gentiles were attaching themselves to the faith, and may have reasoned that this would have an injurious effect upon the Cause they loved to serve.

It would appear, then, that the original motive in sending Barnabas to Antioch was that he might see and judge of the true condition of things, and give a report as to whether the new converts were worthy to be recognized as fellow-heirs with the saints. When Barnabas had arrived in Antioch, he took note of "the grace of God" manifested amongst the believers there. This must have been manifested not only in their faith in Jesus as their Redeemer and

Master, but also in their conduct as disciples of our Lord. Barnabas quickly discerned the cleansing and sanctifying power of the Truth amongst these believers, and thus realized that the Cause, instead of being hindered by such accessions, would be honored thereby. We read that he was glad; and we may assume, although it is not stated, that he promptly made report to the brethren at Jerusalem, and that they were glad also.

The Apostles evidently made an excellent choice when they sent Barnabas to Antioch. The fact that he was a Levite by birth would make him very careful of every Jewish interest connected with the faith; and undoubtedly he was well learned in the Law. He was a native of Cyprus, an island in the Mediterranean Sea, not far from Antioch. Born thus at a distance from Jerusalem and amongst Gentiles, he was probably a broad-minded man, as well as familiar with the dialect spoken by the people of Antioch. Another good reason for sending him was the fact that he was a beautiful character and very helpful as a brother and a teacher in the Church. We remember that he sold a part of his property in the interest of the poor in Jerusalem; and that he received the name Barnabas – "a son of consolation," a helper – as a title of love and respect in the Church.

### **HIS WORK WITH THE YOUNG CHURCH**

Barnabas at once overflowed toward the Antioch brethren, and in the same comforting and helpful manner as at Jerusalem he exhorted them all. Doubtless he saw various things needing to be corrected. But instead of finding fault, instead of lacerating their feelings and chiding them, he began by acknowledgment of what he saw in them as a cause for rejoicing. His comforting message was to the effect that they should cleave unto the Lord with purpose of heart. He wished the dear brethren, new in the Truth, to see to it that their hearts were firmly united to the Lord, that their minds were fully made up, that their consecration was complete.

This was a matter of first importance. Later on he might show them kindly, gently, certain weaknesses of the flesh to which they were addicted. Or, their hearts being more firmly united to the Lord, they might very speedily see these inconsistencies of themselves, without a word being said. The point which we would impress is that it was not a restraining of the flesh, nor a perfecting of it, but a much deeper work of grace than this – a purity of heart, a heart-adhesion to the Lord.

We cannot do better today than to follow this same course in our endeavors to do good unto others as we have opportunity. The brethren need strengthening rather than tearing. They need building up in the most holy faith and in love. They need encouraging in heart adhesion to the Lord. Criticisms of the flesh may come in afterward, but very gradually and kindly.

There were three elements cooperating which made Barnabas so suitable a person for service, and which will surely make any of us an able minister of the Truth. These elements are stated in Verse 24: "He was a good man [moral, upright, reverential], full of the Holy Spirit [he had not received the grace of God in vain; in him it was a living power, the new mind guiding and controlling in all of his affairs] and of faith." However good a man may be, and however much of the Lord's Spirit he may have, a strong faith is essential. "Without faith it is impossible to please God." Let us strive to have all of these qualifications in our ministry, that we may be **[R5888 : page 122]** true sons of consolation, helpful in the Lord's service and to His people wherever we may be. No wonder we read that as a result of the labors of Barnabas at Antioch much people was added to the Lord!

## **SAUL OF TARSUS BROUGHT TO ANTIOCH**

The last we heard of Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:30) was that after the opening of his eyes of understanding, after he had become a disciple of the Lord Jesus, he had preached first in Damascus and

then in Jerusalem, after which, his life being endangered, the brethren had sent him down to Caesarea, and then probably by ship to his native city, Tarsus. We are not informed regarding the nature of his work in his home city, but can readily suppose that one of his character and disposition would not long remain idle. And if the sphere of outward activities was a narrow one, we may be sure that his mind was active in the study of the Divine Plan, and that his great heart was also active, in comprehending Divine grace and in considering ways of service.

Evidently Barnabas had in mind the talents, the force, the logic, of Brother Saul, whom he had met in Jerusalem; and he concluded that, Tarsus being not very far from Antioch, he would look Saul up, interest him in the service of the Church at Antioch, etc. He probably remembered that Saul's ideas respecting the Gospel were extremely broad – too broad, perhaps, for the brethren at Jerusalem to appreciate fully when Saul was amongst them. But by this time all the brethren, and especially large-hearted Barnabas, had come to see the Divine Plan in a broader light – more nearly as Saul of Tarsus had comprehended it.

Barnabas had concluded that the conditions at Antioch were such as would deeply interest Saul, and that the brethren there would be greatly profited by his assistance. So he found Saul, and brought him to Antioch, where his influence was doubtless great. We rejoice in noting the heart nobility of Barnabas. Many Christian men of smaller caliber would have reasoned themselves into a wrong course, saying, "Having had larger opportunities than the others, and having had close contact with the Apostles at Jerusalem, I am the chief one amongst the brethren here. But if I bring Saul into our midst, his superior abilities as a logician, as an expounder of the Scriptures, will cast me quite into the shade."

Brethren who reason thus are misguided by their own selfishness. They forget that the Lord's work is in His own hands;

that with such a spirit they could neither please Him nor be prospered in His service; and that the reactionary effect upon their own hearts would be serious. All of the Lord's people should be noble and unselfish. And the closer we approximate this character, the more shall we be loved of the Lord and of the brethren, and the greater will be our sphere of influence for righteousness, for the Truth, for the Lord.

## **DISCIPLES FIRST CALLED CHRISTIANS**

It is noteworthy that our Lord never gave a name to His people, but called them disciples – pupils, learners. The Apostles have applied to the Church various terms; such as, "Church of the living God," "Church of God," "Church of Christ," "the Church." But gradually the name Christians, identifying God's people with their Redeemer, came to be the general name everywhere.

It is a pity that any have thought it necessary to adopt any other names than these, which are common to the entire Church of Christ, or to use these names in a sectarian manner. Evidently the name Christian should represent one who trusts in Christ as the Messiah – one, therefore, who trusts in Him as the Redeemer and who accepts all the fundamental doctrines of the Scriptures. These doctrines are based upon three declarations: **(1)** That all were sinners, needing to be redeemed before they could be acceptable to God. **(2)** That the believer accepts God's forgiveness through the precious blood of Christ. **(3)** That he has accepted the Leadership and name of Christ and henceforth will seek to walk in His steps.

There was a start toward sectarianism in the early Church, some saying, "I am a Christian, but of the order of Paul." Others said, "I am a Christian of the order of Apollos;" still others, "I am a Christian of the order of Peter." St. Paul promptly rebuked this spirit, assuring them that relationship in Christ was all that was necessary, that neither Peter nor Paul had redeemed them, and that neither Apostle could therefore occupy the place of a head to the Church.

Furthermore, the Apostle calls attention to the fact that such a spirit on their part was an evidence that much carnality still remained, much of a worldly, partisan spirit, contrary to the teachings of the Holy Spirit. – 1 Corinthians 1:10-13; 3:1-7.

It is to be regretted that ever since the Reformation this spirit has prevailed to a large extent, some taking the name of Luther, others, Wesley, Calvin, others non-personal, sectarian or party names such as Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, etc. We are not claiming that those who do so are wholly carnal, without the Lord's Spirit; but with the Apostles we do claim that a disposition to such partisanship is contrary to the Spirit of the Lord, and to that extent is carnal, fleshly, and should be overcome by all who would be recognized of the Lord as overcomers.

What we ought to have is one Church, one Household of Faith, accepting the plain fundamentals of Scripture, and with limitations as to acceptance of more or less conjectural views outside of those fundamentals – all fellowshipping each other, and all known as Christians, and thus separated from all who deny the Atonement, from all who deny the results of the Atonement in the resurrection, and from all who deny the propriety of a newness of life in the present time. In this view of the matter, each individual Christian would have an independence as respects his own thought, aside from fundamentals which are clearly stated in the Scriptures.

### **MISSIONARIES SENT FORTH**

For a considerable time Paul and Barnabas met with the Church at Antioch in the worship of the Lord and in the study of His Word. The result of these studies was that the Church as a whole was developed and brought to the point of considering and praying about means for the spread of the Gospel. There were a number of Prophets – public speakers – and teachers in the Church; and evidently they began to think of how they might be used to the glory of God and to

the blessing of others, as they themselves had been blessed by the Truth.

This is always the case with those who receive the Truth into good and honest hearts. Properly enough, they desire to feed thereon themselves and to grow strong in the Lord. But just so surely as the Truth is received, it gives a strength and a desire to use that strength. This is as true today as it was then. The sanctification which the Truth brings starts with our begetting of the Spirit; and the energy for service corresponds with the quickening of the Spirit.

Evidently the Church at Antioch had an oversupply of teachers, as compared to its own requirements, and began to look about for larger fields of service. They were uncertain as to the course they should follow, and hence looked to the Lord as the real Head of the Church. **[R5888 : page 123]** They served and they fasted; and we may be sure that they prayed also. As a result they came to the conclusion to send forth two of their number – Barnabas and Paul – as representatives of the whole in mission work.

We are not informed in what manner the Lord directed them to this decision. It is possible that this was after the same manner that we today would consider a similar case, and would say, "After studying the Scriptures and praying, seeking thus to know the mind of the Lord, we believe that it would be His will that such ones of our number should go for a public service of the Truth. We believe that we are guided to this conclusion, not by any wrong spirit of pride or ambition, nor with any mercenary motive, but by the Holy Spirit. We believe that it is the Lord's will that we as a congregation should send forth these representatives to carry the light to others."

In some manner the conviction came strongly to the Church at Antioch that this was its duty and privilege. It is worthy of note that the Church sought out its very best representatives for this service, thus letting the spirit of self-sacrifice prevail. No doubt the Lord blessed the Church correspondingly, and made up to them the loss sustained in the giving of these two very talented brethren to the mission work.



## **ORDINATION AND LAYING ON OF HANDS**

The proper course having been decided upon, the congregation fasted, prayed and laid their hands upon Paul and Barnabas, and then sent the two on their missionary tour with God-speed. The laying on of hands would probably be done by the congregation through their representatives, the Elders. But this proceeding did not signify, as is generally understood today, an "Ordination"; for Paul and Barnabas had been recognized for a considerable time as amongst the principal prophets and teachers in the Church at Antioch. It would not signify authority to preach, as Ordination sometimes means today amongst Christians of various sects and parties.

This ceremony simply meant, "We, the congregation at Antioch, by this laying on of hands of our representative Elders, are sending forth these two men, Paul and Barnabas, on a missionary tour; and that they go, not only as representatives of the Lord and of themselves, but also as representatives of the Church of the Lord at Antioch; and that as such we hold ourselves responsible for their maintenance. We will supply them the needful assistance, and thus will be colaborers – sharing in their labors, sympathizing in their difficulties and trials, helping them in their necessities, and partaking with them also in whatever results shall come to the Lord's praise through their efforts."

Accordingly we find that after this missionary tour the two brethren returned to Antioch, and made report. It would appear that subsequently the Apostle Paul, at least, traveled without any such dependence upon the Church at Antioch – without any such praying and laying on of hands and without any subsequent reports of results of labors – though still in love and sympathy with them, so far as we may judge.

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