

LESSON ONE

THE BIRTH OF FOREIGN MISSIONS

TEXT: Acts 13:1-4.

A. ANTIOCH:

Antioch, in Syria, was founded in the year 300 BC. It was situated on a bend of the Orontes River about fifteen miles from the sea. At the mouth of the river was the seaport of Seleucia.

Many Jews had settled at Antioch and had been allowed to have the same political privileges with the Greeks.

When persecution broke out in Jerusalem, many of the Christians found a refuge at Antioch. They immediately began to preach the gospel. At first they preached in the synagogues and only to the Jews, but later they began to preach to the Gentiles. It was in Antioch that the first Gentile church was founded, and it was here that believers were first called Christians (Acts 11:26).

The name "Christian" means "Christ-like" which was derived from the Greek word "Christos" which is the equivalent of the Hebrew "Messiah," and means "Anointed One."

The new church at Antioch was a daughter church of the Mother church in Jerusalem, but she rapidly grew until she exceeded the church in Jerusalem in vision and strength, and became a Mother church in her own right.

B. BACKGROUND LEADING UP TO THE MISSIONARY MOVEMENT:

When news of the radical development at Antioch reached Jerusalem there was much concern, for the believers left behind at Jerusalem were all strict Jews. They sent Barnabas to investigate the situation. This showed what great confidence the church had in Barnabas.

Undoubtedly Barnabas was one of the greatest characters of the New Testament. He was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith (Acts 11:24). Barnabas was impressed by what he saw, and instead of returning to Jerusalem with complaints he remained in Antioch to direct the work.

The church at Antioch was a young church and needed teaching. Barnabas could have attempted to do this himself, but being a dedicated humble man, he decided to find the best teacher possible. He remembered Saul of Tarsus whom he had befriended several years before this. Therefore, he leaves Antioch and goes to Tarsus and persuades Saul to return with him to teach the new church at Antioch.

Barnabas and Saul labored together at Antioch for one year and the church developed under their ministry to become one of the most important in the early history of the church.

The church that developed under their ministry had the following qualifications:

1. **A BENEVOLENT CHURCH:** The church sent help back to Jerusalem to help the poor saints there (Acts 11:29-30).
2. **A SPIRITUAL CHURCH:** The gifts of the Spirit were in operation at Antioch. God was able to speak to them by prophecy (Acts 11:28 & Acts 13:2). It was a church that fasted and prayed and because of this God was able to speak to them.
3. **A MISSIONARY CHURCH:** It was here at Antioch that the foreign missionary movement was born. This showed that they had a burden for souls and a vision of the harvest field.

When the Holy Spirit spoke through Agabus by prophecy that there was a need in the Mother Church, they sent Barnabas and Saul to Jerusalem with assistance. They delivered their gift and soon returned to Antioch bringing with them John Mark who was the nephew of Barnabas (Colossians 4:10).

C. THE MISSIONARY MOVEMENT BORN IN PRAYER:

The missionary movement was born in prayer. It is only when the church is upon her knees that God is able to speak to her, and that she has the dedication necessary to obey the voice of God.

At this particular time there were five prophets and teachers ministering to the church. Although later both Barnabas and Saul were called apostles, yet at this point they were listed among the prophets and teachers. The names of these ministers were: Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius, Manaen, and Saul. We should note that Barnabas was listed first and probably was looked upon as the leader among them. Also at this point Saul was listed last. However, this soon changed as soon as the Lord had called Saul into His life's work. These ministers were doing three things: (1) ministering to the Lord; (2) fasting; and (3) praying. Undoubtedly the missionary movement would never have been born at Antioch if the church had not been doing these three things. They were in the right attitude for God to speak to them.

What would happen today if the church could be found in this same attitude before the Lord?

D. CHOSEN OF GOD:

The will of God is the all important essential in the work of God.

Barnabas and Saul were not called by man but by God. It was the Holy Ghost who said, *"Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them."*

God has always called specific men for specific tasks. Saul was a chosen vessel to bear the name of Jesus before the Gentiles, and Kings, and the children of Israel (Acts 9:15). It had been a number of years since his conversion and it might have seemed during this long time that the will of God would never be carried out in Saul's life. Just as God has a definite man for a definite work, there is a definite time for the call of God to be fulfilled.

One of the greatest characteristics in Saul's life and ministry was his complete dedication to the will of God. His motto seemed to be: *"As much as in me is, I am ready"* (Romans 1:15).

E. MISSIONARIES SENT FORTH BY THE CHURCH:

God's order in the sending forth of missionaries may be seen here:

1. They were called of God.

2. Their call was recognized by the church.
3. Fasting and prayer must be in evidence.
4. They were sent forth by the Lord in His time and to the places He had chosen.
5. They were sent forth by the church.

This means that the missionary ministry becomes the united effort of the whole church.

LESSON ONE

SELF HELP TEST

A. How do we know that the church at Antioch was a:

1. Benevolent Church?
2. A Spiritual Church?
3. A Missionary Church?

B. Explain clearly how Saul of Tarsus happened to be ministering at Antioch.

C. What three things was the church at Antioch doing when the Holy Ghost called Barnabas and Saul as missionaries?