

GATECITY CHURCH
THE BOOK OF ACTS, PT. 9
CHURCH AT ANTIOCH, ACTS 11:19-30, 13:1-3
MARCH 16TH, 2025 – BILLY HUMPHREY

I. Introduction and Recap

- A. Last week we covered the Gentile Pentecost which as we described was the turning point of the New Testament Church.
- B. Up to this point, the Church was a Jewish church with only those who were converts to Judaism becoming believers. But in Acts 10 we hear the story of Cornelius, a Roman Centurion, who got born again along with his whole household. He became the first convert to Christianity that did not become a convert to Judaism first.
- C. From this point forward, the Church included Jews and Gentiles alike. This sets the stage for the rest of the book of Acts.

II. The Strategic Shift of the Gospel (Jerusalem -> Antioch -> Ephesus)

- A. Jerusalem was the birthplace of the Church. The outpour of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost set the stage for a movement of revival that caused Jerusalem to be the hub for the Church for the first two decades after the resurrection. It was the hub of worship, prayer, teaching, and community for the new Church.

Acts 11:19-21 – “¹⁹ So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone. ²⁰ But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus. ²¹ And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord.”

- B. Once those who were scattered from the persecution that arose over Stephen reached Antioch, the Gospel then spread to the Gentiles. It's important to note from a narrative standpoint that Luke intentionally explained the Gentile Pentecost and the Gospel expansion to Antioch to demonstrate God's desire to include the Gentiles in the mission and growth of the Church.
- C. The revival hub of the New Testament shifts from Jerusalem to Antioch. It becomes the first multiethnic, mission sending Church. Antioch is the base from which the Gospel goes forth throughout Asia minor. All three of Paul's missionary journeys originate from Antioch.

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- D. From Antioch, the Gospel spreads throughout Asia minor, ultimately taking root in Ephesus. From Ephesus, all of Asia heard the Gospel (Acts 19:10). There was a major revival in Ephesus that turned the city upside down.
- E. When we think of the move of God through the book of Acts, it's important to note that it was sparked in Jerusalem, expanded to Antioch, and multiplied mightily through Ephesus.
- F. Jerusalem was the birthplace of the Church, but Antioch became the first model for what the Church was to become.
- G. Antioch had to happen because God always intended for all the nations to be brought into the Kingdom through the Gospel. Antioch became the visible, practical demonstration of God's ancient promise to Abraham—that all nations would be blessed through his seed (Genesis 12:3; Galatians 3:8).

III. Seven Distinguishing Marks of the Antioch Church

Acts 13:1-3 – “¹ Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. ² While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ ³ Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.”

A. Multicultural

1. Antioch was the first Church that was made up of Jews and Gentiles together. This was a huge gulf in the ancient world. In modern days, if you were to take the most opposed cultural groups and put them in the same Church, that would accurately reflect the Church of Antioch.
2. The Church was a reconciled, diverse family, all unified in Jesus. When we see Paul's teachings on unity throughout his epistles and his instructions against cultural divisions and factions, it all stemmed from his understanding of the Gospel and his experiences at Antioch.

B. Team Ministry

1. Acts 13:1 describes a team of prophets and teachers as the leadership team of the Antioch Church. This team was not only multiethnic but it was also socially diverse.
 - a. Barnabas: Greek-speaking Levite from Cyprus

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- b. Simeon (called Niger): His nickname suggests African heritage
- c. Lucius of Cyrene: From modern day Libya, in northern Africa
- d. Manaen: Grew up with Herod Antipas, likely his foster brother
- e. Saul: Former Pharisee from Tarsus, located in modern-day Turkey

- 2. Ideally, the local Church leadership would similarly reflect this diversity in ethnicity and ministry gifts within its leadership team, incorporating apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. These gifts form the backbone of local Church eldership and ministry.

C. Priestly Identity

- 1. The Greek word translated "ministered to" is *leitourgeo*, from which we derive the English word "liturgy." This term was specifically used in the Old Testament to describe the priestly duties performed by the Levites in the temple. More importantly, the Greek tense used here suggests an ongoing, continuous action rather than a one-time event, revealing that the Antioch leadership team regularly gathered in a posture of worship, prayer, and fasting, ministering continually to the Lord. This ongoing priestly ministry was at the very heart of how they led the Church and how the Church functioned.

D. Spirit-Led

- 1. Acts 13:2 says, "While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said..." The Church's primary calling is not simply to be an organization shaped by strategic planning or business models. Rather, the Church is called to be a people wholly dependent on the Holy Spirit's guidance, regularly seeking God's heart and His dream for them. Strategy and planning are valuable and necessary, but they must flow from and be submitted to the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Antioch explicitly illustrates how priestly ministry (worship, fasting, and prayer) naturally leads into prophetic insight (hearing God's voice) and ultimately results in apostolic sending, ultimately advancing God's Kingdom to the ends of the earth.

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E. Mission-Sending (Apostolic)

1. Out of worship and fasting, they sent Barnabas and Saul launching the first intentional missionary movement from a local Church. Mission flows from worship and prayer. We see the priestly ministry begets the prophetic ministry that begets the apostolic ministry (kingly ministry) Antioch was a Church committed to the lost, the nations and to taking the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

F. Committed to Teaching

1. The Church then and now must be grounded in the truth of the Word. (Acts 11:25-26) Barnabas brought Saul to Antioch undoubtedly to encourage Pau but also to pull on his strength as a teacher. There was intentional formation around prayer and the Word.

G. Generosity

1. Antioch was overflowing with generosity. When they prophetically heard that there would be a famine in Judea, they responded with practical generosity. They gave “each one according to their ability”. They lived sacrificially to meet real needs. (Acts 11:27-30) Each movement of the Church’s expansion is marked with a notable mention of generosity. Oh, may the Church in our day be known for her radical generosity as it was known in the first century.