July 3rd – The Origin of "Christian"

"The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch."
(Acts 11:26)

For two millennia, all over the world, followers of Jesus Christ have been identified as Christians. What does it mean and where did in begin? The meaning is simple – a Christian is someone who has placed his/her faith in Jesus and is now following in the footsteps of the Savior. "Christian" was first applied to the believers in Antioch. Ancient Antioch was located at one of the southern-most parts of what we now call Turkey, at the northeast corner of the Mediterranean – a vitally important ancient city.

After Stephen was stoned to death, God providentially caused the first Christians to scatter from Jerusalem. Some went south and west, as far as Cyrene (modern-day Libya). Others traveled north through Samaria, then on to the Mediterranean coast, and even to the island nation of Cyprus. What made the Antioch group of believers so special? The Bible leads us to believe it was the presence of two men – Barnabas and Saul. The encourager Barnabas sent for the teacher Saul and the rest is history.

The Bible says that the dynamic duo stayed in Antioch for one year where "they assembled with the church and taught a great many people" (Acts 11:26). Though Saul probably provided a great deal of instruction, there's no doubt that Barnabas did his part exemplifying the Christian life. "He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith" (Acts 11:24). You may know what "Christian" means and where it began, but can others tell what a Christian looks like when they evaluate your life?