

Antioch

“Places in the life of Christ”



“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” 2 Timothy 2:15

Antioch was once a very profitable city and was often passed through with the spice trade and the Silk Road. However we know it as a place that was very influential in the lives of many early Christians. According to Act 11:19-26, the Christians gathering at Antioch began to grow when the Christians in Jerusalem started being persecuted. They needed to go somewhere to worship freely. Today, we just take that for granted.

After the stoning of Stephen some of the others decided they had to go and also proclaim their belief in Christ, his death and resurrection and the work He did while He was on earth. They were speaking to Grecians and many people were accepting their teachings and turning to the Lord.

The leaders, who were in Jerusalem, heard that there was trouble in Antioch. They sent Barnabas to Antioch to help the others. The followers of Christ in Jerusalem thought that Barnabas was a good one to check things out. When he got there, he started talking to the Greeks about Christ and His teachings. The Bible tells us that God was pleased with the teachings of Barnabas and quite a few Greeks accepted these teachings.

Barnabas knew they needed more help so he went to find Paul and they returned to Antioch and taught there for a year. It was during this time and in Antioch that the followers of Christ were first called Christians. For that reason Antioch is often referred to as the Cradle of Christianity. Up until that time, those who were following the teachings of Jesus were basically only speaking to their fellow Jews.

However, it was some of the Jews from Antioch that stoned Paul and took him out of the city, thinking he was dead. But Paul was not dead. He did leave with Barnabas for a while after the stoning, but eventually they went back to Antioch even though they had been persecuted. They felt there was still work to be done there. Everywhere they went they ordained some elders to carry on the teachings of Christ and organize the churches. One day some of the leaders of the church in Antioch were fasting and waiting for guidance. The Holy Spirit spoke to them and told them to commission Barnabas and Saul to go out to other area and do the work God wanted them to do. So Saul and Barnabas left Antioch and went to other towns, but they never lost touch with Antioch. Acts 13:1-2

At this time, the Christians were meeting in the home of people. Two of the best known for having people in their homes were Priscilla and Aquila. Paul often spoke of them and the time he spent with them. It must have been a double edged honor to be called a Christian. While the people were followers of Christ and honored to be called a Christian, they also faced extreme dangers. We are told they had to be very secretive about when they were meeting and were forced to be silent in public many times about their beliefs.

If you knew that you were going to be persecuted for talking about your belief in Christ would you be willing to do it, knowing that you may be stoned like Stephen who gave his life for Christ. Paul was stoned and thrown in prison, but he never stopped. In fact, it seemed to make him more aggressive. He wrote letters to the churches where he had preached, and as soon as he was out of prison, he was out in the public again.

One time when they returned to Antioch they went into the synagogue on the Sabbath and started to speak. Paul gave quite a long speech as recorded in Acts 13:13-52 on the

Old Testament prophecies and the birth and death of Christ. The next Sabbath almost the whole town was there to listen. Both Jews and Gentiles were turning to Christ, but some of the Jews were upset with the teachings, and probably especially that the Gentiles were going to receive this same salvation so they stirred up the people and Paul and Barnabas were taken out of the city. The Bible tells us they shook the dust of their feet and moved on to another town. They weren't defeated.

Many non-Jews were accepting Christ in other cities. Paul and Barnabas went back to Jerusalem and reported this to the other disciples. There was much rejoicing, but there were a few Pharisees who were upset that these people were not following the law. They needed to be circumcised. Peter and James both spoke and told how Christ was sent for all the people and how the kingdom was to be rebuilt. Barnabas and Paul, along with a couple others, were sent to Antioch with a letter telling them not to allow these little things to interfere with their belief. The church continued to grow and there were many good preachers there so Paul and Barnabas were able to leave and to out to the other towns and help them. Acts 15

Antioch was a hub of activity, not only for the trade but for the growth of Christianity. The lives of people were changing and the presence of God must have been evident in the whole town probably combining the Jews and the Gentiles into one believing body. It is easy to understand why it is often referred to as the "Cradle of Christianity." Living in Antioch would have been uplifting and somewhat fearful. Today, we see revivals in churches and the joy that prevails over the people. It is a joy that we can have always; it was not limited to the people of Antioch.

Prayer: Loving Father, thank You for the opportunity we have to worship freely. Thank You that we can talk about Your love to anyone at any time. Breathe fresh life into us every day. Open us to new life and give us courage to show Your love by the things we do and the things we say. Help us to live boldly for You. Amen

1. Paul and Barnabas had many struggles as they tried to spread God's word. Have you ever encountered any problems as you tried to tell others about God's love?
2. How can we tell people about God's love without preaching?
3. What is the advantage of living in a town where God can be worshipped freely?
4. Did you ever feel persecuted because of your Christian beliefs?