

The Church at Antioch

Lesson Scope: Acts 11:19-30

References in brackets refer to Acts 11 unless otherwise specified

Lesson Focus

Jerusalem, where the church had begun, quickly became the geographical centre of the early church. In today's lesson text, we see that a new congregation was begun in Antioch. This church eventually replaced Jerusalem as the geographical centre of the church.

This relocation and expansion was not the result of man's elaborate planning. It was rather the result of God's leading through circumstances. God knew best how and where to nurture the church.

The Lord leads the church in establishing new congregations. The success of new congregations requires careful adherence to Biblical principles for church building.

Regardless of where a congregation finds itself in relation to church extension, this lesson can be a worthwhile study.

Of course, those in the process of beginning a new work will find many practical helps. If a congregation is more established, perhaps you could take a moment to reflect on God's leading in the beginning of your congregation and keep in mind that the same principles required to begin a work are also required to maintain it.

Do not forget to emphasize the importance of God's leading in church extension. This does not mean that we should do no planning but it does mean that we should not take things into our own hands.

In the Book of Acts, the believers went where God led them, from the Spirit directing Philip, to the scattering by persecution, to the Macedonian call, God still leads through circumstances today

Lesson Aim: To present principles for church extension.

Theme Verse: Isaiah 54:2. Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes.

Lesson Text

Founded

Acts 11:19-21

¹⁹ (KJV) Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. ²⁰ And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. ²¹ And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.

Fortified

Acts 11:22-26

²² (KJV) Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. ²³ Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. ²⁴ For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord. ²⁵ Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: ²⁶ And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.

Fruitful

Acts 11:27-30

²⁷ (KJV) and in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. ²⁸ And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar. ²⁹ Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea: ³⁰ Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

Questions for Study

Founded

1. What message did the fleeing Christians carry with them?
2. How might we fail to keep the Gospel message central in our evangelism?

Fortified

3. In What ways was Barnabas highly qualified to be involved in church extension?
4. How do unqualified individuals hinder church work?

Fruitful

5. How did God reveal His will to believers before the New Testament was written?
6. Why should congregations maintain a connection with one another?
7. How can brotherly assistance strengthen the church?

Analysing the Passage

Phenice (11:19) refers to Phoenicia, an area along the Mediterranean Sea surrounding Tyre and Sidon. Cyprus is a large island in the Mediterranean Sea, the country of which Barnabas was a native (4:36). Antioch was located in Syria, three hundred miles north of Jerusalem. A large portion of Antioch's population is said to have been Jewish. Antioch became the geographical centre of the early church.

Grecians (11:20) were Greek-speaking Jews who lived in foreign countries.

Barnabas was apparently at Jerusalem during this time (11:22). Meanwhile, Saul was at Tarsus (11:25). He was at Tarsus because his life had been threatened while he was attempting to share the Gospel with the Grecian Jews at Jerusalem (9:30). The brethren had sent him to Tarsus to save his life.

The term Christian is first found in 11:26. The phrase were called suggests unbelievers may have coined the term, likely in derision. Regardless, the term has become the most common word to designate a follower of Christ.

Dearth (11:28) means "famine." This famine was not only in Jerusalem, but "throughout all the world." This occurred during the reign of Claudius Caesar, who reigned from A.D. 41 to 54.

Principles and Applications

Founded

1. God's people spread the Gospel wherever they go (11:19-20). Throughout history, God's people have travelled and emigrated for various reasons. Many times, including the time of the early church, the

church has been uprooted by persecution. Other reasons include limited financial opportunities or overcrowded communities. Whatever the reason and wherever they go, God is at work to spread the Gospel message.

2. The preaching of the Lord Jesus and the Word must be central to all church extension (11:19-20). The church's primary calling is not to alleviate poverty or better society. Man does need help to free himself from the vices of substance abuse, financial irresponsibility, and broken homes but the best way to do this is to focus on bringing needy souls to Christ and His Word. Here is where man's true needs can be met.

3. The hand of the Lord is essential for productive church extension (11:21). We should not take church extension into our own hands. The church is the body of Christ, and He must be the Head in all aspects. Sometimes this means respecting a closed door when we thought it was time to move ahead. Other times this means going through an open door that we were not expecting. Without God's blessing we will not prosper.

Fortified

4. We must encourage and strengthen the work others have begun (11:23). The work of the church is ongoing. Merely starting a congregation is not enough. Much commitment is required to provide continued nurture.

5. Congregations need sufficient leadership and other workers (11:23-26). Church extension can stretch the resources of church leaders. This often calls for ordaining more individuals to fill the need. Without sufficient shepherding, the flock will suffer.

6. Leaders and workers in church extension must be sound in faith and full of the Holy Ghost (11:24). Church extension is important, but we cannot build the church with less-than-committed individuals. When workers are hard to find, it can be tempting to resort to filling the ranks with those who hanker after the world or do not support the church as they ought this will have a very negative impact on the work of the church because of the negative influence of such individuals.

7. Church workers must clearly identify with God's people (11:26). Their theology must be sound according to the Scriptures. They must be at rest with the tried and proven practices of the church. Their dress must blend with the church, not with the world. Music interests, elec-

tronic technology, and automobiles must be safely within church guidelines. Those who are crowding the fence on church standards will have a very poor influence.

Fruitful

8. Continued contact with and support from the broader church provides spiritual protection (1:1:2, 7-28). A new congregation requires time to become established. At the very beginning, many decisions will need to be made for the first time. Even after the work is well begun, there can be a certain instability and vulnerability. More time and sufficient growth in size have a way of solidifying the new work. During such struggles, the broader church can provide a protecting influence.

9. As new congregations mature, they can lend their aid to the broader church (11:29—30). No congregation should be only on the receiving end. As a new congregation grows and stabilizes, members should consider it a privilege to be on the giving end at times as well. This will encourage the bonds of brotherhood and help to tie the church together.

Important Teachings

1. God's people spread the Gospel wherever they go (11:19-20).
2. The preaching of the Lord Jesus and the Word must be central to all church extension (11:19-20).
3. The hand of the Lord is essential for productive church extension (11:21).
4. We must encourage and strengthen the Work others have begun (11:23)
5. Congregations need sufficient leadership and other workers (11:23-26).
6. Leaders and workers in church extension must be sound in faith and full of the Holy Ghost (11:24).
7. Church workers must clearly identify with God's people (11:26).
8. Continued contact with and support from the broader church provides spiritual protection (11:27-28).
9. As new congregations mature, they can lend their aid to the broader church (11:29-30).
10. A strong teaching program is essential to successful church extension (11:26).

Answers to Questions

1. What message did the fleeing Christians carry with them?

The fleeing Christians carried with them the Gospel message. They preached the Lord Jesus and the Word of God.

2. How might we fail to keep the Gospel message central in our evangelism? The many physical needs we encounter may cause us to lose our focus. Aiming to cure the ills of society is a distraction from the work of the church.

3. In what ways was Barnabas highly qualified to be involved in church extension?

Barnabas was a good man, full of faith and the Holy Ghost. He was willing to seek the help of Saul in the work. He, along with Saul, was entrusted with the material assistance for the brethren at Jerusalem.

4. How do unqualified individuals hinder church work?

Unqualified church workers will mar the message and testimony of the church. Workers and leaders hold extraordinary influence, and any negative influence will spread. Those who do not support the standards of the church will spread that discontentment to others.

5. How did God reveal His will to believers before the New Testament was written?

God often used the Holy Spirit to give guidance. Sometimes this came through other brethren, as when the church received the Holy Spirit's message through Agabus.

6. Why should congregations maintain a connection with one another?

When congregations maintain a connection with one another, it helps to maintain stability and unity in the brotherhood. Newer congregations can lend their zeal and idealism, while established congregations can lend their experience and caution.

7. How can brotherly assistance strengthen the church?

Sharing materially provides evidence of brotherly love. The sharing helps to form a bond of appreciation and care.

Summarizing the Lesson

“Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end” (Isaiah 9:7).

The work of church extension is not yet finished. The church will continue to grow and spread until the end of time. May we fill the part God has for us in this great calling

Research Guide

1. See “Antioch” in Unger’s Bible Dictionary.
2. Study the important role Antioch filled in the rest of the Book of Acts. (Note that there were two cities called Antioch.)