

Tradition & Transition

A new missionary centre: Creative Antioch & reactionary Jerusalem

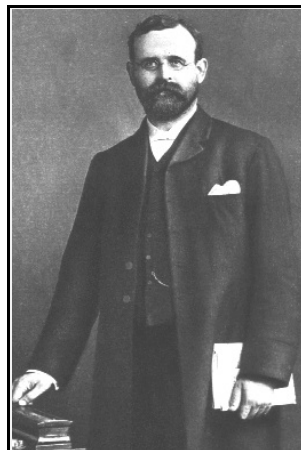
And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch
Acts 11:26

Study 13a: THE KEYS OF THE KINGDOM (11:1-18)

11:1-3 What did the Jerusalem church identify as the *first* key (i.e. condition of entry) to the kingdom?

No one, I think can read this account thoughtfully without realizing how prejudices control and dominate the hearts of men. Most of us are more under power of prejudice in things religious than we realize. Sometimes what we call "conscience" is, after all, only prejudice. We profess we cannot have any sympathy with this or that person (because he does not see as we do) on account of our consciences -- whereas, if we were honest, we should have to admit it was just because of our prejudices. Remember the old saying -- "Orthodoxy is my doxy, Heterodoxy is someone else's doxy." -- **H. Ironside**, *Lectures on the Book of Acts* p.260

It is a black day for a Church when differences of opinion lead to the formation of cliques. Zeal for truth is sadly apt to enlist spite, malice, and blindness to a manifest work of God, as its allies ... We condemn such narrowness, but do many of us not practise it in other forms? Wherever Christians demand adoption of external usages, over and above exercise of penitent faith, as a condition of brotherly recognition, they are walking in the steps of them 'of the circumcision.' -- **Alexander MacLaren**, *Expositions: Acts* p.311



W.H. Griffith Thomas
(1861-1924)

"The angel only did for Peter what Peter could not do for himself"

11:4-18 Note Peter's position as to *Christ's* keys of the kingdom? [Which baptism confers kingdom citizenship]

Study 13b: JERUSALEM CREATING OR REACTING? (11:19-30)

11:19-21 Let us take note of the *essential* message of the scattered disciples (8:4,5,12)

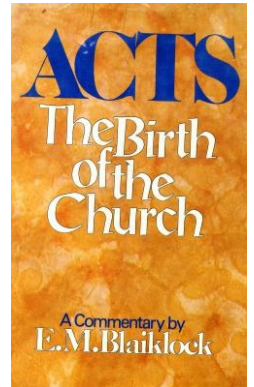
I wish we could always keep to the simplicity of things as we find them here. What led them to the Lord? The proclamation of the grace of God. Nothing else. They did not have to depend on all the other things to which preachers resort today in order to attract the people. -- **Harry Ironside**, *op.cit.*, p.276

11:22-26 This is the great transition passage -- Antioch becomes the centre of mission (check NWT)

This act took the Church into a metropolis of vice. Antioch, a cosmopolitan port and a soldiers' town, was notorious for its evil living. It was the third city in the empire, after Rome and Alexandria, and some claimed it was the second. Juvenal, the Roman satirist, writing half a century after this event, alleged that Antioch had corrupted Rome. A rabble of subtle Greek immigrants, quackeries, whoredoms, and debaucheries had found Rome a place of profit. "The Orontes," Juvenal claimed, "has become a tributary of the Tiber." -- **E.M. Blaiklock**, *Acts: The Birth of the Church* p.93

Antioch grows almost as important as Jerusalem, whose leading apostle will soon disappear from view. It is every way new, new in character, new in its leaders, and here a new name is given to the followers of Jesus. A second center, and one of this nature, was necessary to the evangelization of the world. Jerusalem never started any missionaries to the heathen. A few were forced out. Antioch became the source of the evangelizing forces, and they were sent forth deliberately. Jerusalem was hampered by the Rabbinical yoke. Antioch was free. The education of Jerusalem, by its narrowing restrictive influence, unfitted it for a diffusing source. Its sun shone but it had no rays. Antioch was cosmopolitan. It furnished the platform from which all the world could be seen. It was adapted for that for which it was chosen. It was superior to Babylon because it was on the highway to the west, where the vigor and the life of the race had gone. Babylon was too far east. Antioch was superior to Alexandria, which was too Jewish, and too much addicted to speculative culture. It was superior to any of the great cities farther west, because it was contiguous to Judaism, and yet far enough removed that the narrowness and bigotry prevailing further south might not cramp it. The Holy Spirit spreads the truth, but he uses, as means, the men and the nations qualified for the work by position, by culture and by broad ideas. -- **James Stifler**, *Acts* p.96

Luke gives us two hints that we are entering a new era in the history of the Early Church. First, he speaks of "the church" in Antioch (11:26). Previously he has used the term "church" of the believers in Jerusalem (5:11; 8:1,3; 11:22) or of those scattered from Jerusalem (9:31). Moreover, the wording here is quite remarkable, for Luke does not refer to "the church at Antioch," as though that were merely an extension of "the Church." Rather, he specifically says, "they were gathered in the church," as though the church in Antioch is now considered a separate entity. -- **William S. LaSor**, *Church Alive* p.169



11:27-30 Note the Jerusalem church is now *dependent* -- both for information and *survival*!

Study 13c: TRAGEDY AND COMEDY (12:1-25)

12:1-4 What is Herod's scheme and motivation?

12:5-16 Will prayer open ALL doors? [Compare sleeping Peter with the OLD Peter]

The scene that now unfolds itself at the street-door of this house and inside the house is full of vivid humour. Rhoda's excitement at hearing Peter's voice makes here forget to open the door and let him in; those within cannot believe that the answer to their prayers is standing outside the door; Rhoda must be mad, or else it is Peter's guardian angel, his spirit-counterpart, that she has heard; meanwhile Peter stands insistently and anxiously knocking for admission -- not too loudly, for the hue and cry may already have been raised, and Mary's house is one of the first places to which a search-party will come. -- **F.F. Bruce**, *Acts* p.251

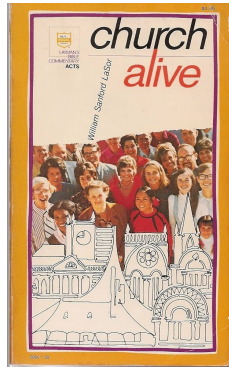
... although they prayed earnestly, this group didn't really believe that God was going to release Peter. When Rhoda came in and said, "Peter's here!" they did not say, "Of course, he is; we've been praying for his deliverance." No; they said, "You're crazy!" This is normal human faith -- the kind we all have most of the time. But God honors even this kind of unbelieving faith. -- **LaSor**, *op.cit.*, p.179

12:17-20 Who finds out *last* what the Lord is up to?

12:21-24 The report of this incident, on first glance illustrating the judgment of God, providentially serves another function -- giving us a chronological pivot point for Acts' events (cf. 11:28; 18:11,12; 24:27)

Herod Agrippa died, according to Josephus, "in the fifty-fourth year of his life and the seventh of his reign," in A.D. 44. We therefore have the first firm synchronism in Acts, for we can date the martyrdom of James prior to Passover (May 1) of 44, and the release of Peter a week or so later. -- **William Sanford LaSor**, *Church Alive*, p.181

This twelfth chapter of the book of Acts concludes the first division of the story of the early days of Christianity. In the records of these first twelve chapters the work was centered in Jerusalem and Judea, and the ministry was very largely to the Jewish people, the people of Israel. When we turn to chapter 13 we find ourselves in an altogether different atmosphere. Antioch in Syria is the center, and the work spreads in large measure among the Gentiles, though the Jews are not neglected. We have spoken of the period covered by these first twelve chapters as a transitional state, and that is right -- as long as we realize the transition was in the mind of man, not in the mind of God. From the moment Christ died on the cross the heart of God was seen as going out to the whole world ... -- **Harry Ironside**, *op.cit.*, p.288



Does Christian unity demand a "Governing Body"?

For the fourth time S. Luke directs our attention to the spread of human infirmity within the church. We have had murmuring, covetousness, and simony, and now we come to *contention* or party spirit, and testing of the church's internal unity ... The way in which the 'contention' was met illustrates the methods of authority in the church. Hitherto the government had rested with the apostles. There had been murmuring against them, but they took the initiative in the consequent action. They decided on the matter of the Samaritans (viii.14). but now, as soon as conscience is touched, brethren do not hesitate to make a charge, even against S. Peter himself. In reply the apostle does not dismiss the charge with an assertion of his own authority, or with a dogmatic decision; nor does he refer the matter to his fellow-apostles alone. Instead, he makes a defence to the church; he narrates what had happened, and trusts for his vindication to the divine will revealed in the facts. From this we may infer that in an important question like the admission of the Gentiles, while the divine will guides, and the apostle interprets and acts upon its indications, it is well that the apostle's interpretation should be submitted to, and obtain the consent of, the church. It is significant that instead of *the apostles* simply, we have in verse 1 *the apostles and the brethren*; and after this in verse 22 *the church*, in ch xv *the apostles and the presbyters*. -- **R.B. Rackham**, *Acts* p.160

In these early days the Church had a very loose organisation. But the fugitives in our narrative seem to have had among them none even of the humble office-bearers of primitive times. Neither had they any command or commission from Jerusalem. No one there had given them authority, or, as would appear, knew anything of their proceedings ... 'Preaching Christ,' in the sense in which that expression is used in the New Testament, implies no one special method of proclaiming the glad tidings. A word written in a letter to a friend, a sentence dropped in casual conversation, a lesson to a child on a mother's lap, or any other way by which, to any listeners, the great story of the Cross is told, is as truly -- often more truly -- preaching Christ as the set discourse which has usurped the name ... Satisfied as to their true Christian character, Barnabas sets himself to help them to grow. Now, remember how recently they had been converted; how, from their Gentile origin, they can have had next to no systematic instruction; how the taint of heathen morals, such as were common in that luxurious, corrupt Antioch, must have clung to them; how uniformed must have been their loose Church organisation -- and remembering all this, think of this one exhortation as summing up all that Barnabas had to say to them.. He does not say, Do this, or Believe that, or Organise the other; but he says, Stick to Jesus Christ the Lord. On this commandment hangs all the law; it is the one all-inclusive summary of the duties of the Christian life. -- **A. MacLaren**, *Acts* pp.319,324

