

## **Bi134 Acts**

### ***Lesson Bi134-21 A Missionary Church is Born***

The birth of a baby is an exciting event. New life has come into the world. Friends and family are delighted as they search the baby's features for likenesses to the parents. "He has his father's hands!" friends exclaim. Or, "She has her mother's eyes!" As the child grows, it quickly acquires the traits and attitudes of the family.

That's how it is with the birth of a new church. It too is an exciting event. Again, new life comes into the world. And, just as with a human child, the infant church should quickly take on the traits and attitudes of its heavenly family. That family is the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. In Acts chapter 11, Luke tells the story of the birth of a new church in the city of Antioch, Syria. As we will learn, the new church quickly takes on the missional nature of its heavenly Father.

Following the Caesarean Outpouring, Peter remained in the city for a few days nurturing the new believers. He then returned to Jerusalem to report to the apostles and elders what had happened in Caesarea. He told them how God himself had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. Peter explained to them that God "gave the same gift to them as he gave to us" (Acts 11:17). The leaders in Jerusalem were glad when they heard the news. They rejoiced that God had granted salvation to the Gentiles.

At this point in his story Luke takes us back several months to the persecution in Jerusalem. You will remember how Saul raged against the church. In panic believers fled the city in all directions. Amazingly, they "preached the word wherever they went" (Acts 6:4).

That's when Philip went to a city in Samaria and proclaimed Christ. Others fled into Phoenicia, to the island of Cyprus, and to Cyrene on the northern coast of Africa. Luke, however, focuses on the missionary work done by those who travelled to Antioch. He does this because something momentous happened there. A great missionary church was born.

As Philip had done in Samaria, the first wave of refugees to arrive in Antioch began preaching the gospel. However, unlike Philip, they only reached out to their fellow Jews. This would be natural since they all shared the same heritage, culture, and language. However, it still was not what God intended, for the vast majority of those living in Antioch were Gentiles. Because Antioch was a large city, people from many places and cultures intermingled there. Many Jews were coming to the Lord. The large majority of the people in Antioch, however, were being overlooked.

Then, a second wave of Jewish Christians arrived in Antioch. These new immigrants came from Cyprus and Cyrene. They did something different from the first wave of Christians to arrive in the city. They not only witnessed to the Jews, they also witnessed to the Greek-speaking Syrians, both Jews and Gentiles. They were full of the Holy Spirit, for Luke says, "The hand of the Lord was with them." As a result of their Spirit-empowered witness, many turned to Christ and began to follow him. As a result of their cross-cultural witness in Antioch, a strong multi-cultural missionary church formed.

When the apostles in Jerusalem heard what was happening in Antioch, they sent Barnabas to check it out. Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith. When he arrived in Antioch and saw what God was doing, he rejoiced. He then began to encourage the new disciples to wholeheartedly follow Christ. As a result of his Spirit-empowered ministry, many people turned to Christ.

Barnabas then went to Tarsus, fetched Saul, and brought him back to Antioch. The two men teamed up and spent a whole year training the believers there. Large numbers of believers attended their teaching sessions. For the first time, people began calling them 'Christians.'

During this time, a prophet named Agabus came from Jerusalem. He predicted that a great famine would come to the Roman world. The church in Antioch realized that the prophecy was from God. They received an offering and dispatched Barnabas and Saul to carry it to the needy saints in Jerusalem.

Antioch was the perfect place to establish a great missionary-sending church. It was the third largest city in the Roman Empire, following Rome and Alexandria in Egypt. It was situated on a major trade route. The Antioch church would become Paul's base of missionary operation. From there he would begin each of his three missionary journeys. It is a great example of what a church should look like. By observing the Antioch church, we learn seven characteristics of a great missionary church:

First, we learn that a great missionary church is empowered by the Holy Spirit. Concerning the Antioch church, Luke says that "the Lord's hand was with them" (Acts 11:21). This is another way of saying that the Holy Spirit was powerfully working in their midst. As a result of the Spirit's powerful working through them "a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord." We too must ensure that our churches are full of the Holy Spirit. We want the Spirit of the Lord to move powerfully among the people.

Second, we learn that great missionary churches are led by men and women who are full of the Holy Spirit and faith. The Bible says that Barnabas, the leader of the church in Antioch, "was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord." Saul, who joined Barnabas in Antioch, was also full of faith and the Holy Spirit. If we are to have truly missionary churches the leadership of the church, beginning with us, must be full of the Holy Spirit and faith.

A third characteristic of a truly missionary church is outward focus. The church in Antioch aggressively reached out to all the residents of its city. And, as we will learn in upcoming lessons, the church would soon reach out to other nations. It did this by sending and supporting Barnabas and Saul as missionaries to various parts of the Roman Empire. They not only reached out to those of their race, they reached out to people of all tribes and races. Luke writes, "Some of them...began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus" (Acts 11:20). They remembered Jesus' last command and promise in Acts 1:8: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

A fourth characteristic of a great missionary church is that they faithfully proclaim the message of Christ. Luke says that the members of this church proclaimed “the good news about the Lord Jesus.” This is a characteristic of disciples throughout the book of Acts. We, like them, must faithfully tell everyone about Jesus.

The fifth characteristic of a great missionary church is that it trains its people in the ways and mission of God. Luke says that Barnabas and Saul “met with the church and taught great numbers of people.” They surely taught them the basics of Christian living. They further taught them about God’s mission and how they could effectively participate in that mission. We must do the same in our churches.

A sixth characteristic of a great missionary church is that they allow the gifts of the Spirit to operate in their gatherings. The Spirit guided and enabled them to do God’s will. The prophet Agabus was permitted to speak by the Spirit in the Antioch church. He warned of a coming famine. Later in Acts, another prophecy will be given there that will launch Barnabas and Saul into their first missionary journey. We too must encourage the manifestation of Spirit gifts in our churches today.

Finally, a true missionary church gives generously to advance the work of the kingdom. Once God’s will had been revealed to them through the prophecy of Agabus, the disciples in Antioch gave generously. Each gave to advance the work, “according to his ability.” Like them, we too must lead the members of our churches into generous missionary giving.

This lesson is **important** because in it we learn about the kind of churches God wants ours to be. He wants them to be Spirit-empowered missionary churches.

The big **truth** we learn is that we should ensure that our churches are full of the Spirit. We must focus on reaching the lost, both in our local neighborhoods and to the ends of the earth.

Let’s now **review** some important truths we have learned from this lesson.

1. What did the second wave of Jewish Christians to arrive in Antioch do that the first wave did not do?
  - A. [PAUSE] If you answered, “They began to share the message of Christ with people of different tribes and nationalities,” you answered correctly.
2. What did Luke mean when he said the hand of the Lord was with those who were sharing Christ with the people of Antioch?
  - A. [PAUSE] If you answered that when Luke said that the hand of the Lord was with them, he meant that the Spirit of the Lord was working powerfully through them, you are right.
3. Recite from memory the seven characteristics of a great missionary church?
  - A. [PAUSE] If you answered that a great missionary church (1) is empowered by the Holy Spirit, (2) is led by men and women full of the Holy Spirit and faith, (3) is

outwardly focused, (4) faithfully proclaims the message of Christ to the lost, (5) trains its people how to do ministry, (6) allows the gifts of the Spirit to operate, and (7) gives generously to advance the work of the kingdom, you answered correctly.

Your **assignment** is to listen to this lesson several times until you can accurately share the story of the Antioch with others. See if you can recite from memory the seven characteristics of a great missionary church. Then develop a lesson on these seven characteristics and teach or preach it to a group of people.