

Resurrection Life of Jesus Church

BACK TO THE BOOK OF ACTS (BBA)

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PART 27: RESTRUCTURING THE CHURCH

It is not easy for a Christian living in the 21st century to understand the thinking, way of life and the structure of the political and religious establishment at the time of Christ during the first century. Most Christians do not pay attention to these details while others superimpose our current type of civilization on the early church and get a skewed understanding of the New Testament.

THE SEPARATION FROM TALMUDIC/CABALISTIC JUDAISM

Up to this time, the apostles and the believers in Christ were all Jewish. They had no intention of separating themselves from it, but keep the old traditions and add Jesus to the mix. They were very much like the European nations that became Christian but never gave up their pagan traditions. The modern day result is a mix of Christ with paganism like Christmas, Valentine's Day, St. Patrick's Day, Easter and Halloween.

Remember that Talmudic Judaism had not come into existence until the captivity in Babylon some 500 years before Christ.

The apostle Paul was pressured by the other apostles in Jerusalem to go along with this thinking. **Acts 21:17-30**

It would take some 30 years of teaching by the Holy Spirit to separate the disciples of Jesus from the traditions of Judaism. The final break came when the Romans destroyed the Temple in 70 A.D.

PETER'S EXPLANATION

After Peter preached to the household of Cornelius, he eventually returned to Jerusalem and was attacked by the other apostles. **Acts 11:1-3**

Peter sought to convince them that it was the Holy Spirit who had led him to visit Gentiles, preach to them and baptize them in water. **verses 4-17**

The apostles and the Christian Jews living in Jerusalem accepted the fact that God had granted salvation to the Gentiles but they had no intention of giving up the Jewish traditions. **verse 18**

The stubbornness of these Jewish believers can be seen in **verse 19**.

REACHING OUT TO THE GENTILES

It is interesting that Jews from Cyprus and Cyrene in North Africa who had been to Jerusalem and heard the preaching about Jesus were the first ones that started the great move to preach Christ to the Gentiles. **verse 20**



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There is no doubt in my mind that God had selected the city of Antioch, located 300 miles north of Jerusalem on the left bank of the river Orontes and sixteen miles inland from the Mediterranean Sea in what is today Lebanon to become the center of the growing church of Jesus Christ. God knew that Jerusalem would be destroyed and moved the central leadership to Antioch. **verse 21**

When the leadership in Jerusalem found out about the revival in Antioch, they sent Barnabas to make sure that they were true to what Jesus had taught. **verses 22-24**

A TIMETABLE AFTER SAUL'S CONVERSION

After Saul's conversion on the road to Damascus, he did not go directly to Jerusalem, but went into the desert of Arabia. We don't know how long he stayed in the desert. He then went back to Damascus. It was not until three years after his conversion that he went to Jerusalem and spent 15 days with the apostle Peter. **Galatians 1:15-19**

This does not mean there is a discrepancy in the Book of Acts. Luke is simply saying in **Acts 9:25-26** that Saul went to Jerusalem but he gives no timetable.

My conclusion is that the foundation of the church in Antioch took place around five years after the Day of Pentecost.

SAUL IS BROUGHT BACK TO THE CHURCH

It was Barnabas who had taken Saul under his wings after his conversion and had been instrumental in having Saul accepted as a genuine born again believer in Christ. **Acts 9:26-30**

Barnabas then traveled to Tarsus, a city some 150 miles away on the coast of what is today Turkey. We are not told if he traveled by land or by sea. **Acts 11:25**

Barnabas brought Saul back to Antioch where they labored for a year. There were no church buildings like we have today. Christians met in homes, outside in fields or on riverbanks. Each city had a central church leadership with a pastor or bishop. The pastor would teach the elders, who in turn would teach and preach in cell groups in the city. **verse 26**

THE CHURCH OF ANTIOCH

The city of Antioch was the third largest city in the Roman Empire with a population of 500,000 people. It was the provincial capital for the Roman province of Syria and the people prospered financially. The city also had a large Jewish population.

Despite devastating earthquakes, the largest one in 526 A.D. when more than 250,000 persons were killed, the Church of Antioch was able to survive until 635 A.D., when it was taken by Islamic forces.

The church peaked in power and influence when Chrysostom was a deacon and later a priest from 386-398 A.D.

The Church of Antioch started in power of the Holy Ghost and became a soul willing church. It was the center for missionary outreach until it was forced to become a Roman Catholic Church and began to rot from the inside.

THE FAMINE RELIEF

According to historical tradition, the prophet Agabus was one of the 70 others that walked with Jesus. The church of Jesus Christ was vibrant and the Holy Spirit was able to give a prophetic warning about the coming famine in the region. As a result, the Church in Antioch was able to send relief supplies to the Christians in Judea. **Acts 11:27-30**

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THIS CHAPTER?

1. Christianity and Judaism cannot be mixed! The first Covenant is gone and doesn't exist anymore. Jewish people practicing Judaism are doing so in vain because God has rejected it. God does not hear their prayers nor is He pleased with their worship. **Galatians 3:1-29**
2. A church can be born in a time of revival and the move of the Holy Spirit but still end up dead if the leadership and the people do not maintain their first love. **Revelation 2:1-7**

DO YOU HAVE AN EAR TO HEAR WITH?