

Many Heard and Believed

“The hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.”
—Acts 11:21

DURING THIS PRESENT

Gospel Age, a wonderful invitation to share with our Lord Jesus in the great restoration work of his future kingdom has been extended to those with hearing ears throughout the world. Under Christ's righteous rule, the sin-sick and dying human family will be lifted up and given an opportunity to obtain the right to life that was taken away because of father Adam's disobedience to the Divine law.

THE EARLY CHURCH

In the days of the Early Church, those who went to other areas to preach this message of the heavenly call, went to the Jews only. “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.” (Acts 11:19) The record states, “Some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch,

spoke unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus.”—vs. 20

Because of intense persecution, many Jewish brethren from Jerusalem had gone to other places, and they helped spread the message of Truth. Sometimes their Gentile neighbors heard the message and, as their interest in the Gospel increased, some of them also became believers and began associating with their Jewish brethren.

BELIEVERS AT ANTIOCH

The scriptural record indicates that Gentile believers in Antioch were among those who had heard the message of Truth. The apostles who were in Jerusalem learned of this, and Barnabas was selected to go there. He had previous association with Greeks when he lived in Cyprus, and no doubt understood their language. When he arrived, he found a mixed congregation of Jewish and Grecian brethren who were rejoicing together in the knowledge of God’s plan and heavenly calling, and were eager to learn more.

Barnabas set about to assist them as much as he could in further study and joint fellowship. “He was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord.” (vs. 24) As a result of his valuable help, the church in Antioch began to prosper and, through their witnessing activities, many others were also added to the church. As Barnabas witnessed this increasing interest in the Truth by Gentile brethren, he recalled what the Lord had declared about Paul’s special ministry to the Gentiles. He believed that Paul would have a vital interest in the call to the

Gentiles, and he set out for Tarsus to find him. "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."—Acts 11:26

BARNABAS AND PAUL

Barnabas and Paul were selected as elders in the church at Antioch, along with three other brethren whose names we learn from Luke's scriptural record. "Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul." (Acts 13:1) As teachers, these brethren had very diverse backgrounds, and all came from distant places.

Barnabas had lived at one time on the island of Cyprus; Saul came from Tarsus in Asia Minor; Lucius was from Cyrene, a city in northern Africa, in what is now Libya. It is not known with certainty where Simeon came from, but since the name Niger which means black and is associated with him, he evidently came from the African continent. Manaen was from Jewish royalty, being a foster brother to Herod the Tetrarch, and most likely originated in Jerusalem.

During this time, a famine was experienced in this area of the world which severely affected the church members who were living in Jerusalem, and who were already quite poor. When the congregation at Antioch learned of their plight, they took up a collection and sent it by the hands of

Barnabas and Paul to help their friends in Jerusalem. No doubt this was of much help to the brethren. This mission also afforded Barnabas a chance to give a firsthand report of the witness work which was being accomplished among the Gentiles, and he emphasized that it was prospering very well. It also gave him an opportunity to better acquaint the brethren at Jerusalem with Paul and his important part in the work.

GENTILES HEAR THE CALL

The church at Antioch wanted to expand their witness activity, and decided to send Barnabas and Paul to sow the seeds of Truth in outlying countries. "Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also. And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do."—chap. 15:35,36

Concerning Paul's principal ministry we read, "The Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel." (chap. 9:15) However, before he went to the Gentiles, he usually visited the synagogues in an attempt to convince his kinsmen that Jesus was the Messiah. This was the general pattern established by Barnabas and Paul, even though their mission was for the Gentiles as well.

ISRAEL'S UNBELIEF

This special interest in his own people is revealed in his letter to the brethren at Rome. "I

say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.”—Rom. 9:1-5

The apostle knew that the prophecies foretold the unbelief of his people, and that God would not find a sufficient number among them to complete the body of Christ. He had a strong desire for their salvation which caused him to write, “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.” (Rom. 10:1) Again he writes, “I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office: If by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them.”—chap. 11:13,14

Israel’s unbelief would not be turned away until their Messiah would come, and Paul was able to say, “I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob.”—vss. 25,26

TITUS A FELLOWHELPER

One of those who later became a travelling companion to Paul was Titus. He is not mentioned in the Book of Acts, but we know from Paul's other writings that Titus accompanied the apostle and Barnabas when they visited other ecclesias. For example, we learn from the scriptural account, "We have sent with them our brother, whom we have oftentimes proved diligent in many things, but now much more diligent, upon the great confidence which I have [he hath, *Marginal Translation*] in you. Whether any do inquire of Titus, he is my partner and fellowhelper concerning you: or our brethren be inquired of, they are the messengers of the churches, and the glory of Christ."—II Cor. 8:22,23

We also read, "When we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears. Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus." (II Cor. 7:5,6) The apostle made clear, "Therefore we were comforted in your comfort: yea, and exceedingly the more joyed we for the joy of Titus, because his spirit was refreshed by you all." (vs. 13) When Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem, the Jewish brethren were given a good example of the Gentile believers who had heard the heavenly calling, and were now members of the body of Christ.—Gal. 2:1-3

In his letter to Titus, Paul reveals his special love and feeling of close relationship that he had for him. He wrote, "To Titus, mine own son after the common faith: Grace, mercy, and peace, from

God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior. For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee.” (Titus 1:4,5) We thus learn that toward the close of Paul’s ministry he sent Titus to the island of Crete to help the brethren. Although specific information is lacking, he evidently remained there for a considerable period of time and served as an elder in the congregation.

ANTIOCH OF PISIDIA

On the Apostle Paul’s first pilgrim journey, he and Barnabas made their way to Antioch of Pisidia. This city was located in the interior and mountainous region of Asia Minor, which distinguishes it from Antioch the capital city of the Roman province of Syria where the Truth had been preached before. Many Jews were living in Pisidian Antioch where they had established a synagogue.

From the scriptural record, we read, “When they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down. And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.”—Acts 13:14,15

Some of those who were present to hear the apostle’s message of Truth were very interested in what he had to say and wanted to hear more. “When the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath. Now when the

congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God.”—vss. 42-44

JEWES WERE ENVIOUS

Some of the Jews became very upset when they saw so many people coming to hear the message of Truth, and they began to oppose and blaspheme Paul as he was speaking to them. “Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.” (vs. 46) Paul then referred them to the words of their own prophet, when he continued speaking, “ So hath the Lord commanded us, saying, [Isa. 49:6] I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.”—Acts 13:47

The apostle was making an important connection, and we turn again to Isaiah’s prophetic words where we read, “Thus saith the LORD, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages.”—Isa. 49:8

THE ACCEPTABLE TIME

This present Gospel Age is the ‘acceptable time’ for this wonderful work of the heavenly calling to proceed, and to help find a people for God’s name.

James said, "Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name." (Acts 15:14) When this very special day of salvation has been completed and the full number of the Christ has been brought together, the Heavenly Father will then bring the whole world into covenant-relationship with himself under the terms of the New Covenant. These members are now preparing themselves for the future work of its glorious administration.

REJOICING GENTILES

The Gentiles who were listening to Paul speak that day in Antioch of Pisidia, pointed to the fact that no longer was the message concerning the Truth confined to the Jews or their synagogue. "When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region."—Acts 13:48,49

The Gentiles to whom the Lord was extending the heavenly call understood and believed the wonderful message of Truth. However, the opposing Jews convinced the authorities to expel Paul and Barnabas from the area, but not until the new disciples in Pisidian Antioch were established in the knowledge of the Truth, and had received evidences that the Holy Spirit of God was working among them. We can only imagine the sense of joy that Paul and Barnabas felt when they left that area and recalled the many blessings they had received from ministering to these new brethren in Christ.

THE CALL WENT TO ICONIUM

From Luke's record, we learn that Paul and Barnabas set out again on their journey. "It came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed." (Acts 14:1) The unbelieving Jews in Iconium opposed these two servants of God and the message of Truth that they were proclaiming. They enlisted the support of unbelieving Gentiles to the point where the whole city was divided against Paul and Barnabas, which created an intense situation. They even devised a plot to stone the servants of God, but with much courage they remained for several weeks to continue preaching the Word before they were forced to leave. In the meantime, they did much to help the new disciples of Christ at Iconium to become established in the faith.

AT LYSTRA

Concerning these two men of God, we read, "They were ware of it, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about: And there they preached the gospel." (vss. 6,7) While they were in Lystra a very strange experience occurred concerning a man who had been lame from birth, and had never walked. The Apostle Paul healed the man because he recognized that he had great faith. The people who witnessed this wonderful miracle were so overcome by their emotions that they began believing that Barnabas was Jupiter and Paul was Mercury—gods who had come to them as men. As the excitement grew,

the local priest of Jupiter arranged to offer a sacrifice to them as if they were gods. Paul and Barnabas had a difficult time trying to stop the proceedings, and to convince the people that they were just ordinary men like themselves. They rent their mantles and spoke to the crowd, explaining to them about the true God who made heaven and earth, and finally restrained the crowds from offering their sacrifice.—Acts 14:8-18

PAUL LEFT FOR DEAD

In the meantime, the Jews of Antioch and Iconium joined forces and followed Paul and Barnabas to Lystra. They convinced the people that they were imposters and began stoning Paul. There are no details given of the incident, but no doubt as the stones began to hit Paul he recalled the circumstances of Stephen's stoning over which he had presided. We learn that the apostle had evidently entered into a state of semi-consciousness, was dragged outside the city's walls and was left for dead.—vs. 19

TAKEN TO DERBE

"Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe." (vs. 20) It must have been seen as a miracle to the bystanders who watched as Paul regained his consciousness and returned with the disciples, probably to one of their homes. There he partially regained his strength, while the disciples discussed a plan for getting him away safely. When he could travel again, Barnabas, and perhaps some others, took him to the neighboring town of Derbe. There, perhaps, one of

the families took the apostle in, and nursed him back to health in their home. It was no doubt the home of Timothy's family who resided there, and of whom Paul speaks so highly in later writings, where we read, "Then came he to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek: Which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium."—chap. 16:1,2

PAUL'S LOVE FOR TIMOTHY

In one of the apostle's letters to Timothy, we learn just how much he loved this young brother. He begins with a beautiful salutation to Timothy which expresses his appreciation for him and his example of faithfulness to the Lord. "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus, To Timothy, my dearly beloved son: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day; Greatly desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears, that I may be filled with joy; When I called to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also. Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands."—II Tim. 1:1-5

Through this letter, we learn of the great respect that Paul had for Timothy's mother and

grandmother, who were each consecrated in Christ and both of whom he knew. His letter also reveals some of the very painful experiences that he had endured when he was first brought to their home. "Thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." (II Tim. 3:10-12) At the time of the apostle's first visit to the home of Timothy's family he was likely but a very young lad. He would have thus been aware of some of Paul's special trials and persecutions, and particularly the care given to him when he arrived there from Lystra.

SUFFERING ADVERSITY

It is evident that the Adversary, Satan, had tried again to suppress God's purpose concerning the heavenly call, and the spreading of the Truth message to those who had a hearing ear. We recall Paul's commission as a special servant of God. "The Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake. (Acts 9:15,16) Again we read, "That we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God."—chap. 14:22

The apostle was learning that those who faithfully follow Christ Jesus must suffer persecution.

He knew that all the brethren would experience persecutions as well, and that they too might learn this same lesson. Those who had tried to kill Paul must have followed up by also persecuting the brethren living in these same cities.

If Paul had been killed by the stoning at Lystra, God's wonderful plan for the heavenly calling would have suffered a major setback to the preaching efforts in Asia Minor. Barnabas was spared this stoning experience perhaps because he was the older man of the two, and it would have been much more difficult for him. Paul's youth and vigor helped him to recuperate more rapidly.

Some might believe that such an experience which almost cost the apostle his life, would have persuaded Paul to avoid those cities where there was such severe opposition to the Lord's work. But he could not let these newly found brethren struggle on their own when they needed his assistance. In each of these visits, he and Barnabas were forced to leave prematurely because of persecution. Paul's love for these brethren grew as he witnessed their consecration and devotion to God. The stoning incident had weakened him physically, but the success in finding so many interested brethren required that more attention be given to their needs. After staying awhile and finding many disciples in Derbe, he and Barnabas started back, retracing their steps to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, confirming the Truth to the disciples and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and encouraging them to endure what persecutions would come upon them.—chap. 14:21,22 ■