

# Antioch, the Evangelistic Church

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The first great Gentile church was in Antioch of Syria, whose beginnings are described in Acts 11:19–30. This city was one of 16 so named by Seleucus Nicator, who became king of Syria at the death of Alexander the Great. Located about 300 miles north of Jerusalem, it was a center of government, trade, the arts, learning and wickedness. It was strategically located for evangelizing the vast areas to the north and west of Jerusalem.

1. The Gospel first entered Antioch on the lips of Grecian Jewish Christians, fleeing the rigorous persecution in Jerusalem. They evangelized Gentiles as well as Jews and were given much encouragement by the Lord.
2. They were very evangelistic in Antioch. Their zeal and growth were such that the church in Jerusalem heard of their success and sent Barnabas to assist. His exhortations increased their efforts and their success to the point that Saul was brought from Tarsus to help with the work. This resulted in an even greater soul harvest. They were able to accomplish much more by remaining in one large body instead of swarming to several small groups. The only means they had of communicating the Gospel were personal and public teaching, both of which they used with great zeal. Were they alive now, they would surely use all of the modern tools of communication we now enjoy.
3. They were very generous. A prophet from Jerusalem told of a great, world-wide famine that was coming. Although they would be affected by it too, they first thought of their brethren in Judea and collected funds to help them immediately. God is a generous God and so must His children be.
4. They were zealous in foreign evangelism. Upon returning from Jerusalem where they had delivered the contribution, the Holy Spirit told Antioch He had some special plans for Barnabas and Saul (Ac. 13:1–3). They were sent to Asia Minor, at that time untouched by the Gospel. There was apparently no jealousy or resentment in the church at having to share their two great preachers with others. Upon returning, they went out again, and Paul then returned and went out a third time. Thus, Antioch served as the springboard for evangelizing much of the first century world.

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