

Paul & the Church at Antioch

*The Sending Church — From Hellenist Refugees to
the Apostolic Sending Base*

c. AD 33 – c. AD 52

Primary Source: Holy Scripture · noblemind.study/apostle-paul/


*This is a focused timeline. For the broader chronology of Paul's life, consult the parent timeline
([Paul_Life_Timeline.pdf](#)).*

Phase 1 — The Gospel Reaches Antioch (c. AD 33–42)

~AD 33–35

Pre-Paul

Hellenist refugees from Stephen's persecution reach Antioch; the gospel goes to Greeks

 Acts 11:19–21


When Stephen was stoned and a great persecution arose in Jerusalem, the believers were scattered. Most went only to Judea and Samaria; some pushed further — to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch — speaking the word to Jews only. But certain men of Cyprus and Cyrene came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks as well, preaching the Lord Jesus. The hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord. This is one of the most important sentences in Acts: the gospel had reached Gentiles before Cornelius (Acts 10), but the Antioch outreach was the first organized, sustained mission to non-Jews — and it was carried out by unnamed lay believers, not by the apostles.

Antioch on the Orontes was the third-largest city in the Roman Empire after Rome and Alexandria — capital of Syria, a cosmopolitan center of commerce and culture, with a large Jewish community.

~AD 42

Pre-Paul

Jerusalem dispatches Barnabas to investigate

 Acts 11:22–24


News about what was happening at Antioch reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch. The choice was apt. Barnabas (whose name means “son of encouragement,” Acts 4:36) had a known pattern of seeing what God was doing and joining it rather than questioning it: he had sold a field to support the early Jerusalem believers (Acts 4:37), and he had vouched for the converted Saul when no one else trusted him (Acts 9:27). When he arrived at Antioch and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and began to encourage them all to remain true to the Lord — for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. Considerable numbers were brought to the Lord.

Phase 2 — Saul Joins; “Christians” Named (c. AD 43–44)

~AD 43–44

Saul Joins

Barnabas fetches Saul from Tarsus; a year of teaching together

 Acts 11:25–26a; cf. Acts 9:30; Gal 1:21–24

Barnabas left Antioch for Tarsus to look for Saul. He had not seen Saul in perhaps six years — since the brethren had hurried him out of Jerusalem to escape a plot (Acts 9:30). What Saul had been doing during the silent years in Syria-Cilicia is summarized only in his own words: “they only kept hearing, ‘He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy’” (Gal 1:23). Barnabas knew where to find him and what he was capable of. He brought Saul to Antioch, and for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers. The decade-long pause in Saul’s public ministry ended here.

~AD 44

Saul Joins

The disciples are first called “Christians” at Antioch

 Acts 11:26b

A small note in Acts becomes one of the most consequential lines in early church history: “the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.” The Greek is *Christianoi* — a Latin-influenced formation, similar to *Herodianoi* or *Caesariani*, marking adherents of a particular figure. The name was almost certainly coined by outsiders — perhaps the Roman authorities, perhaps the wider populace — and it may have been mocking in intent. But the church received it. Within a generation, the name appears in Peter’s first letter (1 Pet 4:16) and in pagan sources like Tacitus (Annals 15.44) and Pliny the Younger (Letters 10.96), and it has been the church’s name ever since.


Tacitus, writing c. AD 116 about the Neronian persecution of AD 64, says: “the people called them Christians.” Pliny the Younger, writing to Trajan c. AD 112, uses the name throughout his report on how to handle the sect.

Phase 3 — Antioch as Mission Base (c. AD 46–48)

~AD 46

Mission Base

Antioch sends famine relief to Jerusalem by Barnabas and Saul

 Acts 11:27–30

Prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch, and Agabus stood up and predicted by the Spirit a great famine over the whole world. The Antioch church — freshly established, full of teaching from Barnabas and Saul — immediately resolved to send relief to their brethren in Judea, each according to his means. They did this, sending it by the hands of Barnabas and Saul. This is the first inter-church benevolence recorded in Acts: a Gentile-majority congregation in Syria collecting funds for the Jewish mother church under famine conditions. The same pattern — Gentile churches caring materially for the Jerusalem saints — would dominate the last years of Paul’s free ministry (Rom 15:25–27; 1 Cor 16:1–4; 2 Cor 8–9).

Detailed in the Jerusalem Visits spoke from the receiving end. The Claudian famine in Judea is attested by Josephus (Antiquities 20.51–53) c. AD 46–48.

~AD 47

Mission Base

The Holy Spirit sets apart Barnabas and Saul; the First Journey commissioning


 Acts 13:1–3

There were prophets and teachers at Antioch — five named: Barnabas, Simeon (called Niger, “the black”), Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod Antipas), and Saul. The diversity is striking: a Levite from Cyprus, a man with a Latin nickname suggesting African descent, a North African from Cyrene, the foster brother of the same Herod who beheaded John the Baptist, and a Cilician Pharisee. While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” The remaining three fasted and prayed, laid hands on them, and sent them away. This is the moment Antioch becomes a *sending* church — not just one that receives the gospel but one that exports it.

~AD 48

Mission Base

Return from the First Journey; the report to the sending church

 Acts 14:26-28

From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch — the city from which they had been commended to the grace of God for the work they had accomplished. They gathered the church together and began to report all the things God had done with them, and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. They spent a long time with the disciples. The pattern is plain: sent OUT by the church, returned TO the church to report. Antioch was the sending base AND the accountable home. The Pauline mission was never freelance.

Phase 4 — The Council Crisis & the Antioch Incident (c. AD 49)

~AD 49

Council Crisis

The circumcision crisis begins at Antioch

 Acts 15:1-3


Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and began teaching the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” The crisis began *here* — at the city most affected, the Gentile-majority congregation whose very existence depended on the answer. Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them. The Antioch church determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue. They were sent on their way by the church, and as they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria they described the conversion of the Gentiles to the great joy of the brethren they met along the way.

The Council itself is detailed in the Jerusalem Visits spoke. Antioch is included here because the crisis began here and the decree was for the Gentile believers.

~AD 49

Council Crisis

Paul, Barnabas, Silas and Judas Barsabbas bring the decree back to Antioch


 Acts 15:30-35

After the Jerusalem Council’s decision, four men were sent back to Antioch: Paul, Barnabas, and the two delegates from Jerusalem — Judas called Barsabbas and Silas, leading men among the brethren. They went down to Antioch and, gathering the congregation, delivered the letter. When the church read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement. Judas and Silas, being prophets themselves, encouraged and strengthened the brethren at length. After spending time there, they were sent away from the brethren in peace, back to those who had sent them out. Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch, teaching and preaching with many others also, the word of the Lord.

~AD 49

Antioch Incident

Peter comes to Antioch; Paul rebukes him publicly

 *Gal 2:11-14*

When Cephas came to Antioch, Paul opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For prior to the coming of certain men from James, Peter used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision. The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away. When Paul saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, he confronted Peter in front of them all: “If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?” The Council’s decree had settled the question in writing. Peter’s withdrawal from table fellowship contradicted it in practice — and Paul did not wait for the contradiction to harden into precedent.


Treated as a sidebar in the Jerusalem Visits spoke because it touches the Council’s gospel question. Here it is part of the Antioch story proper because it happened at Antioch and tested the sending church’s integrity. The timing relative to the Council is debated — the reading offered here follows the order Paul gives in Galatians, which places the Antioch incident after the Council-like meeting.

Phase 5 — The Partings & Final Brief Return (c. AD 49-52)

~AD 49-50

The Split

Paul and Barnabas part over John Mark


 *Acts 15:36-41*

After some days Paul said to Barnabas: let us return and visit the brethren in every city we proclaimed the word of the Lord, to see how they are. Barnabas wanted to take along John Mark — his cousin (Col 4:10) and the same Mark who had deserted the team at Perga during the First Journey (Acts 13:13). Paul refused: he kept insisting they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia. There occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another. Barnabas took Mark and sailed away to Cyprus — his own home country and the first stop of the original journey. Paul chose Silas — one of the Jerusalem delegates who had stayed at Antioch — and left, being commended by the brethren to the grace of the Lord. Barnabas drops out of the Acts narrative here; Mark, however, is later restored to Paul’s confidence (Col 4:10; 2 Tim 4:11: “Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service”).

~AD 52

Final Visit

Paul's last brief return to Antioch; departure on the Third Journey

 Acts 18:22-23

Returning from his Second Missionary Journey by way of Ephesus, Caesarea, and Jerusalem, Paul came down to Antioch. He spent some time there, and then left and passed successively through the Galatian region and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples. This is Paul's last recorded visit to Antioch. From this point on his center of gravity shifts to Ephesus and the broader Aegean — the Third Journey will not return to Antioch, and the later imprisonments hold him in the West. Antioch, the church that sent him out three times, drops out of the narrative. Its work — naming a worldwide movement, sending the apostle to the Gentiles, defending the gospel question that established the Gentile church — was, by the time Paul left it for the last time, essentially complete.

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