

'He Came as a Flood'

The hand of the Lord in Antioch, and Wales, and Korea, and ...

Andrée Seu



God hides nuggets of gold in plain day and surprises us with new findings in passages we've read a hundred times. I came across this yesterday:

"Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith." (Acts 11:19-24).

Antioch means nothing to you. It's a smudge buried in a middle chapter, a name on a list. You read "Jerusalem" and "Antioch" in one breath and conjure cities of equal nebulousness. They are in fact Plainview, Texas, and Chicago for size difference. I learned that "Antioch on the Orontes" (present day Antakya, Turkey) was the third-largest metropolis in the empire, after Rome and Alexandria. Picture all the best and all the worst of great cities: megalomaniac building projects of Pompeii, Julius Caesar, Herod the Great, Augustus, Tiberius; crime, theaters, squalor, aqueducts, shrine prostitution, public baths, fountains, amphitheaters, paved street with colonnade, crossroads of continents and three major trade routes.

Who founded the church at Jerusalem? The Apostles (for human proxy). Who founded the church at Antioch? Unknown and unnamed refugees from Cyrene and Cyprus. How did it happen? "The hand of the Lord was with them" (v. 21).

What was the response of the church leaders who got wind of this irregular development 300 miles away? They sent Barnabas to check it out. What did Barnabas do? He came, he saw, he got out of the way of the Holy Spirit. "The wind blows where it wishes," and even Jesus gave the Spirit wide berth when the disciples came to Him with complaint: "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us. But Jesus said, 'Do not stop him'" (Mark 9:38-39). Moses was not so foolhardy as to halt a Holy Ghost locomotive when his disciples brought complaint about two men prophesying outside the normal top-down sanctioned church structures: "Joshua the son of Nun, the assistant of Moses from his youth, said, 'My lord Moses, stop them.' But Moses said to him, 'Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put His Spirit on them!'" (Numbers 11:28-29).

Details on the Antioch phenomenon are not given — except they prayed and fasted (Acts 13:1-3). Wouldn't you love to know how it happened — no formal church building, no sound system, no seminarians, no website, no Power Point, no minivan? But Antioch became the launch pad for Paul's and Barnabas' missionary adventures. By the time of Theodosius, there were 100,000 believers.

Do you think it was anything like the Welsh revival of 1904, where a teenager named Florrie Evans publicly declared in a youth meeting that she loved Jesus with all her heart, and the Spirit fell and ignited Cardiganshire?

Was it like the Korean Pentecost of 1907? Missionaries William Blair and Bruce Hunt explained, "We had reached a place where we dared not go forward without God's presence. Very earnestly we poured out our hearts before Him, searching our hearts and seeking to meet the conditions. God heard us and gave us an earnest that week of what was to come. Before the meetings closed, the Spirit showed us plainly that the way of victory for us would be a way of confession, of broken hearts, and bitter tears." Missionary Jonathan Goforth adds, "They honored God the Holy Spirit by six months of prayer and then He came as a flood."

"Let your fleece lie on the threshing floor of supplication till it's wet with the dew of heaven" (Charles Haddon Spurgeon).