

GRACE GAZETTE

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Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.

Hebrews 12:12-13

ANTIOCH

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 first time we read of a “city”, in the scriptures, is when Cain built a city and named it Enoch in honor of his newborn son of the same name. (see Gen. 4:17) This is the same Cain who slew his brother in a fit of jealousy at the revelation of GOD’s sovereign choice to receive Abel and his offering while rejecting that of Cain. The next time we see a city mentioned is when King Nimrod the “mighty hunter” built numerous cities in the plain of Shinar such as Nineveh and Rehoboth. The most famous (or infamous) of these cities was Babel. “*And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.*” (Gen 11:4) The building of this city and the tower which was to serve as its crowning jewel is an illustration of man’s desire to exalt himself and to worship and serve the creature more than the CREATOR. At the same time, it serves as a clear demonstration of the LORD’s judgement on any who will exalt themselves. For it was here that the LORD confused the pride of men by confounding their language and scattering them upon the earth. “*So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city. Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.*” (Gen 11:8-9) “*The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.*” (Psa 2:2-4)

Even in these early days of man’s inhabitancy of the Earth, we see his open rebellion against that ONE whom the LORD has set in place to rule in Zion. HE will have no rival and will destroy all who would dare to stand against HIS sovereign dominion. “*Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.*” (Psa 2:6) “*The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner? Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.*” (Luke 20:17-18)

The cities of this world have all been indwelt by wicked men and the concentration of their populations has exacerbated and encouraged that innate wickedness which we see manifested as the LORD destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. The only “just” (see II Pet.2:7) man that could be found in that city (i.e. Lot), was rescued out of it. Yet the only righteousness which he possessed was that which was imputed to him according to the grace of the ONE who sent messengers (i.e. angels) to cause him to flee from the wrath that was to come. He was “just”, not because of his morality, but because of the ONE who is the JUSTIFIER of HIS elect.

The wickedness of the flesh, even of this one whom the scripture describes as “just”, is demonstrated as he fled to another city, Zoar, for a short season. Yet the LORD destroyed even this place of refuge as HE caused Lot to flee from it. There was nothing “upright” in Lot’s conduct in the ensuing days, and nothing commendable about his sin, yet the LORD meant his sin for

good as his incestuous liaison produced offspring from which the lineage of CHRIST is traced. In this the LORD would show us that there is no good thing in men, all of their RIGHTEOUSNESS, is that which is imputed to them by the REDEEMER. It is strictly according to the wisdom of GOD (and not that of men) that HIS purpose is seen to unfold in the sending of HIS SON into the world born of a woman, yet completely untainted in HIS flesh by the sin of those HE came to redeem.

So, we find little recommendation in the scriptures for "city dwelling", yet the LORD is pleased to call HIS sheep even while they are in the midst of these ungodly habitations. One of these cities which has prominent reference made in the New Testament is the city of Antioch. It is mentioned eighteen times. The LORD had people in that city, both Jew and Gentile, whom HE would call out of darkness and into the LIGHT. Thus, HE was pleased to send "messengers" (i.e.; gospel preachers) to declare the unsearchable riches of CHRIST, that they might hear and believe, and flee from that "city" (i.e.; this evil world) and its ensuing destruction, even as the saints of old. *"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city."* (Heb 11:13-16)

When many believers were scattered, in the days following the stoning of Stephen, some of them went (actually were sent, unbeknownst to them) to the city of Antioch. At the first they (being Jews) only preached to the Jews of that city. One of those men (sent) was, likely, Nicolas who was a native of Antioch (see Acts 6:5) who had become a Jewish proselyte and had moved (or we might say "was" moved) to Jerusalem where he heard and believed the gospel, and was one of the seven who were appointed as the first servants of the church there, being a man *"full of the HOLY GHOST and wisdom."* (see Acts 6:3)

The LORD raised up many who believed the gospel of the glory of JESUS CHRIST and upon hearing of their "faith", the church at Jerusalem, sent Barnabas to bear witness of them and to them. While he was there the LORD caused many of the Jews to believe. In time Barnabas left Antioch in search of Paul and finding him; brought him back to Antioch. They both assembled with these believers for a year and the scripture notes that it was here in Antioch that those who confessed to being the followers of CHRIST were first called Christians. And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. *"And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch."* (Acts 11:26) This "name" (though probably bestowed upon them in a derisive way, by the unbelievers in the city) was actually quite a mark of honor. For it indicates that they were openly confessing those things that they believed and walked in obedience to those precepts. We sadly point out that this "name" has come to mean very little in the present day, since it is applied to men in such a general way as to signify nothing and most, claiming to be such, can produce little evidence in support of it. *"I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead."* (Rev 3:1)

These "Christians" in Antioch sent monetary gifts for the relief of the suffering brethren in Jerusalem, demonstrating their willingness to "bear one another's burdens." It was here in Antioch that the LORD was pleased to move among the people to send Barnabas and Saul (not yet called Paul) unto the work which HE had called them to do in carrying the gospel to the island of Cyprus. When they returned to Antioch they went to the Synagogue, (as was their custom as Jews) on the Sabbath (i.e., seventh day of the week), and while there, declared the unsearchable riches of the crucified and risen CHRIST. Few of the Jews desired to hear of this MAN, yet many of the Gentiles (some being Jewish proselytes) who gathered on the fringes of that assembly desired to hear more of these things. Thus, Saul and Barnabas, spoke to them on the following Sabbath and the multitude of the Jews made a mockery of them but nearly the whole city turned out to listen to this message. Here we read of one of the most glorious and incontrovertible passages in the scriptures, which declares the Sovereign electing grace of GOD in appointing HIS people unto SALVATION. *"And 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) All of these things happened in Antioch unto the glory of our blessed GOD and SAVIOR. Have you believed?

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