

45 AD – ANTIOCH CHURCH BACKSLIDES INTO MAN’S RELIGION

“And upon all the high mountains, and upon all the hills that are lifted up.”
(Isaiah 2 v 14)

EVENTS IN 45 AD

The next events recorded in Acts follow the death of **Herod Agrippa** in 44 AD (see our paper [44 AD](#)): **“But the word of God grew and multiplied. And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark.”** (Acts 12:24-25)

PAUL AND BARNABUS IN JUDEA

In 41 AD **Paul** and **Barnabus** were in **Antioch** (see our paper [41 AD](#)). Because of a famine the disciples in **Antioch** sent gifts to believers in Judea by the hands of **Paul** and **Barnabus** (Acts 11:29-30). They were sent before the events related to the miraculous release of **Peter** from prison in 42 AD (see our paper [42 AD](#)). They returned after the death of **Agrippa** in 44 AD.

PAUL AND BARNABUS IN ANTIOCH

After their three year absence (42 AD to 44 AD) **Paul** and **Barnabus** and **Mark** returned to find the church in **Antioch** had changed.

When **Paul** and **Barnabus** first ministered in **Antioch** the city was filled with new converts. Three years later the church was noted for abundance of prophets and teachers:

“Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; Barnabas, Simeon that was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen, who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.” (Acts 13:1)

The church in **Antioch** had survived the absence of **Paul** and **Barnabus**. The early converts stayed grounded in their faith in the Lord Jesus and continued to fellowship together.

“As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said: ‘Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them’. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.” (Acts 13:2-3)

The word 'minister' in the phrase '**As they ministered to the LORD**' is the Greek word **λειτουργεω** (li-toorg-eh'-o) which means: '*to assume a religious office*' such as '*of priests and Levites who were busied with the sacred rites in the tabernacle or the temple*'. It comes from the Greek word **λειτουργός** (li-toorg-os') which means '*an official priest of God*'.

Notice that when **Paul** and **Barnabus** departed for their mission the 'ministers' in the church of **Antioch** '**laid their hands on them**'. The 'official priests of God' were giving their 'official' blessing as 'God's representatives on earth' for something the Spirit of God had commanded?!

In the three short years that **Paul** and **Barnabus** had been away the church of lively believers in **Antioch** had ossified into a religion ruled by official priests lording their authority over the church. Where did this doctrine of religion come from? It wasn't from **Paul** and **Barnabus**.

Acts tells us one of the three key figures in Antioch was **Manaen** "**who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch**". **Herod the Tetrarch**¹ was **Herod Antipas** – the same **King Herod** who murdered **John the Baptist** at the wish of **Herodias** through her daughter **Salome**. The city **Herod Antipas** built in Galilee called Tiberias was known as a center of the Pharisees.

The familiarity of **Manaen** with the teaching of the Pharisees may explain how the church at **Antioch** could have adopted such a religious Jewish flavor in spite of the fact the fellowship in **Antioch** and the population of **Antioch** were ethnically Greeks (Acts 11:19-20).

PROPHECY OF ISAIAH 2 V 14

"And upon all the high mountains, and upon all the hills that are lifted up." (Isaiah 2 v 14)

In the Bible a mountain or a hill represents a dynasty, a movement, a set of beliefs held by a people. The prophecy of Isaiah 2 v 14 is speaks to 'high' mountains and to hills that are 'lifted up' – in other words of movements that exalt themselves above the knowledge of the LORD.

When **Paul** saw how quickly and easily new believers could be seduced by supposed 'official priests of God' into adopting a system of religion 'the Church' – he must have been shocked. Greeks had observed religious rites in temples administered by priests for as long as anyone could remember. Paul discovered loving religion came very naturally to Greeks.

¹ Herod Antipas was ruler of Galilee from 4BC to 39 AD – one of the four sons of Herod the Great who shared rule of his father's former kingdom. Antipas divorced his wife to marry Herodias who had been his half-brother's wife. Antipas built the city Tiberias on the shores of Galilee to honor the emperor who appointed him. It became a center of Pharisaism.

The prophecy of Isaiah 2 v 14 follows from Isaiah 2 v 12 '**The LORD has a day in store for the proud and lofty, for all that is exalted – they will be humbled**'.

Rather than be an instrument of division in a young fellowship and cause a schism by rebuking the 'official' leaders in **Antioch**, **Paul** and **Barnabus** set out to plant the faith in new fields.

The year spent in **Antioch** gave **Paul** fresh motivation to preach a gospel of freedom from man's religion. Fearing the judgment of God as he did, **Paul** understood if the saints deviated from the belief **Jesus Christ** is LORD - and accepted a religion where local 'official priests' have authority over the saints - painful discipline from God would surely follow.

Antioch became the battleground - '**The LORD has a day in store**' - over requirements to place upon Gentile believers which drew all the original apostles into a heated debate (Acts 15) with **Paul**. **Antioch** was also the place of an angry confrontation between **Paul** and **Peter** over the issue of circumcision and placing Jewish customs and laws upon Gentile believers (Galatians 2). **Paul** would win both debates and the prophecy would come true regarding the **Antioch** church 'official priest is the minister of God' model: '**they will be humbled**'.

SPIRITUAL NUMBER ANALYSIS

For a mind that has wisdom please read on. See truth from another perspective.

PART ONE

Chapter **2** of Isaiah is the **2nd** chapter of The Prophets.

The spiritual number **2** means 'Division' or 'Discern'

Paul and **Barnabus** divided themselves from the backsliding neo-religious movement in **Antioch** and separated themselves as servants of **Jesus Christ** to preach the gospel.

PART TWO

Isaiah **2 v 14** is the **17,700th** verse in the whole Bible starting at Gen **1 v 1**.

The number **17,700 = 50 x 354**

The spiritual meaning of **50** is 'Purify'

The spiritual meaning of **354** is 'Make a Religious Show'

Paul already knew from his own life long adherence to the strictest sect of Judaism that being religious did not bring the righteousness of God. Only the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross brought righteousness to believers. The **Antioch** experience showed **Paul** how quickly and easily religious ways could seduce followers of Jesus into re-adopting Jewish practices in part or in whole and thereby diminishing the work of Christ on the Cross, grieving the Holy Spirit, and stunting spiritual life in a community of the faith.

PART THREE

Isaiah **2 v 14** is the **45th** verse of The Prophets starting at Isaiah **1 v 1**.

The spiritual meaning of **45** is 'Preserved Life'

In spite of all – the faith in Antioch was not quenched, nor the zeal of **Paul** to make known the way of salvation through **Jesus Christ**.