

Jerusalem and Antioch: A Template for Outreach

The church in Jerusalem had certain characteristics:

- Based in Jerusalem.
- Regular prayer and worship in the temple, fellowship in believers' homes.
- Overwhelmingly Aramaic-speaking Jewish Christians (*Hebraioi*).
- No overt intent to form a separate religion, but existed within a pluralistic Judaism.
- Confessed Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah.
- Entry by baptism and (assumed) circumcision.
- Led by the apostles, in particular by Peter and James the Elder.
- Mission was primarily to the Jews (full restoration of Israel, i.e. backwards looking).
- Very limited intentional Gentile missionary work.
- Anticipated mass Gentile conversions in the eschatological pilgrimage of nations to Jerusalem.
- Accepted Gentile converts from amongst the "God-fearers" but these were to be circumcised and must submit to the full Torah.
- Maintained that both faith in Jesus and obedience to the Torah was necessary for salvation.

As did the church of Antioch:

- Based in Antioch (modern-day SE Turkey).
- No temple worship, but had regular worship and fellowship in believers' homes.
- Overwhelmingly Greek-speaking Jewish or Gentile Christians (*Hellenistai*).
- Confessed Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah.
- Entry by baptism without circumcision.
- Led by Paul and Barnabas.
- Called "Christians," i.e. not viewed as a Jewish sect but as an entirely new religion.
- Self-understanding as the launching pad for a new humanity in which all social distinctions were overcome by *agape* love and fellowship, i.e. forward looking.
- Very intentional Jewish and Gentile missionary work, including in Cyprus and Asia Minor and Greece.
- Eager to win Gentile converts without the need for circumcision and Torah compliance.
- Jewish and Gentile believers fellowshiped together freely, without ethnic distinctions.
- Maintained that faith in Jesus and baptism were necessary for salvation. Circumcision was unnecessary.

Jerusalem and Antioch were very different communities of faith:

Jerusalem	Antioch
Theology and practice focused on the past.	Theology and practice focused on the future.
Passive, reacting to external influences.	Actively seeking to influence.
Defined theologically by the past.	Defined theologically by the future.
Leaders remained mainly at Jerusalem.	Sent leaders out as missionaries.
Anxious about risks.	Willing to face risks.
Guarded theological and ethnic boundaries.	Crossed theological and ethnic boundaries.
Focused on consolidation.	Focused on mission.
Focused on the Torah, with dominant role for obedience to the Torah.	Focused on grace, with obedience to the leading of the Spirit.
Reluctant to cross frontiers.	Eager to cross frontiers.
Ethnically homogenous (mostly Jewish some some Gentile believers).	Ethnically diverse.
Institutionalized.	A dynamic movement.

Understandably, there were tensions....

- Jerusalem not happy that Peter ate with the uncircumcised Gentile called Cornelius (Acts 11.1-3).
- Jerusalem sent Barnabas to investigate the news coming to Jerusalem from Antioch (Acts 11.22).
- Jerusalem insisted that new believers be circumcised (Acts 15.1).
- A delegation from Jerusalem caused Peter to cease eating with uncircumcised Gentiles, and he was then rebuked for hypocrisy by Paul (Gal. 2.11-14).
- Jerusalem still “zealous for the law” after all Paul’s missionary journeys complete (Acts 21.20).

But, there was a resolution....of sorts

- At the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15), the Antioch / pro-Gentile party prevailed over the Judaizers of Jerusalem.
- Judaizers however followed Paul on his missionary journeys to insist that new Gentile believers be circumcised (Gal. 3).

- Paul himself went further than the Jerusalem Council by allowing those with strong faith to eat food offered to idols in 1 Cor. 8.
- The Church initially ministered to Jews, there followed a Gentile influx, and then the Church was overwhelmingly Gentile and ministering primarily to Gentiles.
- The Jewish component of the Church faded away over the centuries.

Which leads us to reflect on our own motives for service....

There are questionable motives:

- Imperialist motive – turning converts into docile subjects of colonial authorities.
- Cultural motive – mission as the transfer of the missionaries’ “superior” culture.
- Romantic motive – mission as the fulfillment of the desire for exotic locations and overseas adventure.
- Ecclesiastical motive – the urge to export one’s own confession and church authority to new territories.

There are also theologically defensible motives:

- The conversion motive – emphasizes personal decisions for Christ, but narrows the Kingdom of God to the number of “saved” souls.
- The eschatological motive – points believers to the 2nd Coming, but ignores present needs or injustices.
- The church planting motive – builds congregations, but identifies the visible church with God’s kingdom.
- The philanthropic motive – works for justice, but limits God’s Kingdom to social improvements in this world alone.

But there is an absolutely necessary motive:

- The motive of *agape* love – as ambassadors of Christ, we are constrained / compelled by the love of Christ for those He died to save (2 Cor. 5.14).
- Gospel Commission I (Matt. 28.18-20) – make disciples, teach and baptize.
- Gospel Commission II (Luke 24.44-47) – proclaim repentance and forgiveness in the name of Jesus.
- Gospel Commission III (John 20.21-23) – proclaim the promise of the Holy Spirit and forgiveness for sins.
- Gospel Commission IV (Acts 1.8) – witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus.

And what do we proclaim in our work?

1. Jesus Christ is the divine Son of God. He is not merely a teacher (e.g. Aristotle or Plato), a civic leader (e.g. Moses) or a lesser deity (e.g. Siva). (John 8.58-59; 10.30-33, Matt. 16.14-16, 1 Cor. 15.14-20).
2. Jesus Christ is the unique source of life and salvation and people need to know about Him (John 3.36, Acts 4.12, 1 John 5.12).

3. Jesus Christ offers a unique salvation – by grace through faith (Eph. 2.8-9).
4. Jesus Christ offers a universal salvation – all inclusive and exclusive in nature (John 3.16; 14.6).