

Building Antioch Churches

By Apostle John Eckhardt



Characteristics of Apostolic, Territorial Governing Churches

The Antioch church is a model apostolic church. The church in Jerusalem was the first church governed by the Apostles, the Holy Spirits emphasis shifts to the church at Antioch. From Antioch the ministries of Barnabas and Paul and later Silas and later Silas and Paul were released. The Antioch church became a spiritual hub to release apostolic teams that affected nations.

From Antioch God initiated apostolic endeavors that resulted in the planting of strategic churches. The churches of Corinth, Philippi, Colossi, Ephesus and Thessalonica were all formed as a result of the outreach from the church at Antioch.

The church at Antioch represents a governing territorial apostolic church. It represents a church that has a burden for nations and is focused on fulfilling the Great commission.

The characteristic of this church gives it the unique ability to be a strategic church in the plan of God. When a local church has these characteristics, it will impact the regions and territories to which it has been given jurisdiction.

Models are important because they give us a pattern in which to build. We must be careful to build according to Biblical patterns and not the traditions of men. Apostolic churches are prototype churches. They are models that reflect the blueprints and pattern that God is releasing from heaven. Each generation needs models that will be an impact to that generation. These churches are built by revelation. Apostles are wise builders (1Cor. 3:10). They build according to revelation and are not dependent upon man made patterns that many build by.

Jonathan David states "It takes apostolic wisdom to plant and raise up an apostolic church that resembles Antioch in its nature, structure, ongoing lifestyle and ministry". Most pastors that I have met think they are building an Antioch type of church. Further conversations however reveal otherwise because most pastors are building on a blessing model concept rather than on a building model concept.

There are twelve characteristics of the Antioch church I'd like to share. These twelve characteristics when present in a local church will cause that church to impact its generation. These are constants that we need to have in every generation. Some things change over time but constants remain the same.

1. Breakthrough Believers

Now they which are scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, and Cyprus, and Antioch preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only, And some of them were come to Antioch, spoke unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. (Acts 11:19-20).

The church at Antioch was initiated by believers who had been scattered from Jerusalem. When they came to Antioch, they responded to the Holy Spirit's directions and began ministering to the Greeks. Up to this point the Gospel had been preached primarily to the Jews. By preaching to the Greeks, these believers crossed a cultural barrier and saw great success. This is why we refer to them as breakthrough believers.

Breakthrough is defined as an act of overcoming or penetrating an obstacle or restriction. It is a major success that permits further progress, as in technology. With each breakthrough provision is made for further progress. Breakthrough benefits the entire body of Christ and makes room for advancement.

This is the foundation of the church at Antioch. Churches that have breakthrough believers will have a foundation to breakthrough and penetrate into various regions. The limitations of culture and religion are broken. These are believers that respond to the leading of the Holy Spirit without fear. They obey the Holy Spirit even if it means initiating something new. These are pioneer believers.

The apostolic anointing is a pioneering anointing. Apostles are set in the church FIRST by God (1Cor.12:28). First is the Greek word *PROTON* meaning first in time, order, or rank. This word represents a pioneer.

Although the church at Antioch was not founded by apostles, these believers came from an apostolic community in Jerusalem. They carried an apostolic spirit and were able to pioneer and breakthrough in Antioch.

To pioneer means to venture into unknown or unclaimed territory to settle. Pioneer believers go into new areas both in naturally and spiritually. Breakthrough believers are believers that have broken the limitations of culture, tradition, religion and fear. They have broken the barriers that restrict most people. They are not limited by mindsets that hinder people from launching out and going into unfamiliar territory. They are not bound by the prevailing mentality of the church.

Breakthrough believers are led by breakthrough leaders. Leaders that are apostolic will demonstrate a capacity to break barriers. They have a grace to pioneer.

They move out into new area of truth and revelation in spite of persecution and misunderstanding. They are the first to embrace and preach a restored truth. They stir and raise up a breakthrough company of believers.

Antioch churches are breakthrough churches. They consist of breakthrough believers who are accustomed to initiating and launching new things. They do not hesitate in obeying the Lord and go where He tells them to go. They are not afraid to cross cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious barriers. They cannot be contained in a small place but are always expanding into more of the plan and purpose of God.

If you desire to build an Antioch church, you must build it with breakthrough believers. These are people who have broken out of the normal patterns of religion and tradition.

They have overcome the obstacles that prevent most believers from crossing barriers. Breakthrough believers are the building blocks of the Antioch churches. Jonathan David gives the following characteristics of breakthrough believers based on the believers who came to Antioch.

- A. Pioneer new moves of God
- B. Able to move under intense pressure
- C. Move without compromise
- D. Move in progressive revelation
- E. Move under authority
- F. Move to impact society

2. Evangelism

As the believers responded to the Holy Spirit to minister to the Grecians, they broke through into a new evangelistic endeavor. Their emphasis was on expanding the Kingdom of God through evangelism.

Antioch churches have a foundation of evangelism. The spirit of evangelism is strong in these churches. I call this Breakthrough Evangelism. This is the spiritual ability to penetrate into areas and reach new people groups.

The Great Commission cannot be fulfilled without evangelism. Although the great commission is an apostolic commission, evangelism is an integral part of fulfilling it.

Philip is the New Testament pattern for the evangelist. He went to Samaria and preached Christ. He cast out demons and healed the sick (Acts 8). He was able to break open the city of Samaria. He came out of an apostolic community in Jerusalem.

Breakthrough evangelism is a characteristic of Antioch churches. They break the normal barriers and patterns that would limit evangelism. They are able to reach those who have been unreached. Groups of people that previously were overlooked, bypassed, or simply the undetached are touched by breakthrough evangelism.

Antioch churches will see the release of companies of evangelist. This gift ministry is recognized in Antioch churches. Evangelism is a part of the spiritual DNA of these churches. It is part of their life blood. They live and grow through evangelism.

They gain momentum through breakthrough evangelism. They are open to the holy Spirits leading into new areas and people groups. They are not limited to a particular people group. They will not overlook the people groups who are in their own cities. They will develop strategies to reach these people. They will establish a beachhead in every community.

3. Apostolic Input

Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem; and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch (Acts 11:22).

Antioch churches are those that are willing to receive APOSTOLIC INPUT. Immediately after the founding of this church, the church at Jerusalem sent Barnabas. Barnabas was an encourager who came to exhort the new church. The sending of Barnabas by the Jerusalem church represents apostolic input.

Apostolic input strengthens local churches. When churches honor and respect “sent” ones, they will partake of the grace that is upon the sent one. Apostolic input helps churches to grow by laying a proper foundation. The church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Eph 2:20). The new believers at Antioch began to receive the proper foundation for growth and spiritual development.

New churches need encouragement. Barnabas means son of consolation. He was an encourager that helped strengthen and encourage new believers. His maturity was needed for the new work. He was a good man filled with the Holy Ghost and faith.

Churches that lack apostolic input will often remain weak and immature. The church at Antioch began to mature very quickly because of the input of mature ministry gifts. It began to grow both naturally and spiritually. There was a continued spiritual momentum released in this church.

Apostolic input is accomplished by the visit of apostolic and prophetic gifts as well as the visit of apostolic teams. These anointed gifts will strengthen, mature and release believers into a level of maturity necessary to have impact and influence in regions beyond.

4. Grace

Who, when he came and had seen the grace of God, was glad and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord (Acts 11:23).

Antioch churches are churches of grace. Grace is an identifiable mark of these churches. Barnabas noticed the grace that was in this church. Grace is the favor of God. There are blessings that come with this favor. When Gods favor is upon a church, it will grow and be a blessing to many.

Churches with grace will come behind in no gift. (1Cor.1:7). These churches have an abundance of spiritual gifts. This includes the gifts of the Holy Spirit, as well as ministry gifts. Gifted churches have a calling and a commission to bless people. This grace is not given without reason. Grace is Gods favor given to be a blessing. Cities, regions and nations can be touched by the grace that is upon a church.

There is a grace to preach, teach, prophecy (gifts of utterance). There is also grace that brings revelation and insight into the plans and purposes of God. Churches with great grace must not waste this on themselves. They must be stewards of the manifold grace of God. They must disperse and dispense this grace to as many as possible.

The Antioch church became a great blessing to many nations. From Antioch, apostolic grace was released to plant churches and bless other cities. Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi and Thessalonica all benefited from the grace that was upon Antioch. How many regions and nations are benefiting from the grace that is upon our churches?

To the extent that grace is on a church is the extent of the blessing it should be to others. Unto whom much is given, much is required. Unto him who has shall more shall be given. These are laws of the kingdom. God's purposes are fulfilled through grace. Grace gives these churches the ability to do extraordinary things.

There will be an abundance of gifted ministries in Antioch churches. These churches become a spiritual magnet for fivefold ministry gifts. Ministries will also be developed within these churches.

Because there are so many gifts within Antioch churches, there must be a structure to facilitate and release them. One of the ways this is done is through the development and release of teams.

5. Team Ministry

Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people, And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch. (Acts 11:25-26).

After Barnabas came to Antioch and saw the grace that was upon this church, he went to Tarsus to get Paul. Barnabas knew the grace that was upon Paul's life and encouraged him to come to Antioch. Barnabas and Paul assembled themselves with the church at Antioch and ministered as a team. Thus they established the team concept at Antioch.

Barnabas and Paul would later be released as a team from Antioch. Apostolic ministry is team ministry. A team of apostles, prophets and teachers will have a tremendous impact upon the spiritual condition of a church.

When Jesus came and ministered he gathered together a team around him. He ordained twelve to be with him. Jesus established the team concept and left us a pattern for breakthrough ministry.

Barnabas and Saul are identified as prophets and teachers. They labored as a team to build up the saints at Antioch. Antioch churches are built through team ministry. There is a group of anointed ministries that build up the saints. They have resident teams and if necessary bring in apostolic teams to build. The church can not be built by the gift of one single person. We are seeing a shift from the pastoral mode of ministry, where one shepherd does the majority of ministry to an apostolic mode of ministry where a team of labors together to build the church.

Apostles and prophets work together to lay foundation. These two gifts form a powerful team that is able to release revelation into a church concerning the plans and purposes of God. (Eph.3:5). They are governmental gifts that operate in power and authority. They have the power and authority to root out, tear down, throw down, destroy, build and plant (Jer.1).

Antioch churches develop teams that can be released to the nations. Apostolic and prophetic teams are matured within the church to be released to impact the regions where they were sent.

People in an Antioch church understand the team concept of ministry. They have corporate vision and purpose. They understand that no one person can do it alone. They are not jealous or intimidated by other gifts. There is a spirit of cooperation and unity in the Antioch church.

There will be a development of apostolic teams, prophetic teams, evangelistic teams, pastoral teams, teaching teams, prayer teams, praise and worship teams and deliverance teams.

These teams give Antioch churches the ability to bless cities, regions and nations. The Antioch church is not a one man show. It is a group of anointed leaders working together towards a common goal.

6. Teaching

Antioch Churches are teaching centers. Barnabas and Saul taught together as a team for an entire year at Antioch. Antioch believers were instructed and taught in the Word of God. Without a strong WORD base churches will not be strong enough to breakthrough. The Word of God gives the basis for all we do.

Antioch believers are people of knowledge. They are not ignorant of the Word of God. They have been taught and receive the instruction on a continual basis. The church at Antioch was strengthened through the teaching ministry.

Teachers are respected and received in an Antioch church. The teacher is also a governmental gift. It is mentioned third in (1 Cor.12:28). There is an authority to instruct and impart knowledge to the saints. This authority and grace must be respected in the church and place must be given for the teacher to minister. The teaching ministry was one of the distinctive marks of the Antioch church. They ministered along with the prophets (Acts 13:1).

Teachers should be a part of the presbytery of an Antioch church. They will minister along with the other governmental gifts of the apostles and prophets. They instruct new believers. To teach means to instruct, to educate, to enlighten, to ground, to explain, to clarify and to interpret.

This is important especially for new believers who have many questions when confronted with the truth of the gospel.

Antioch churches will teach foundational principles as well as advanced truths. The teaching will be apostolic. Churches must be built upon apostolic doctrine. The teaching is a result of apostolic and prophetic revelation. The teaching level of Antioch churches is high. Many of the believers will then have an ability to teach others. There is a duplication of the teaching anointing resulting in a company of teachers and teaching believers.

Antioch believers become teachers who are able to mentor and train others. They become pattern believers who are able to explain the scriptures and defend the truth. They study to show themselves approved unto God, a workman that need not be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth (2Tim.2:15). This is an apostolic injunction. Study is reading, reviewing memorizing, researching and meditating. Antioch churches are places that are conducive to the study of the Word of God.

7. Benevolence (Giving)

And there stood up one of them Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be a great dearth throughout the world; which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar.

Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea: Which they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul (Acts 11:28-30).

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The church at Antioch received prophetic ministry. They honored the ministry gift of the prophet and received the word delivered by Agabus. He foretold of a coming famine in Judea.

The church at Antioch was a benevolent church. They were a giving church that shared and distributed their resources with the churches of Judea. Apostolic distribution is another characteristic of an Antioch church.

There is an apostolic mandate to bless the poor. This is seen in Paul's ministry of receiving offerings for the poor saints of Jerusalem. Apostolic churches should touch poor nations and minister to the needy.

Antioch churches are giving churches. There is an apostolic grace to give. Supernatural offerings are common in these churches. There is a spirit of liberality. There is a great grace that results in great giving (Acts 4:33).

Benevolence is kindness, goodness, graciousness, compassion and humanitarianism. Antioch churches share their wealth with the poor. They especially minister unto poorer believers in other regions and nations.

Benevolence is also a present, a gift, contribution or donation. To be benevolent means to be unselfish, kind-hearted, generous, charitable, liberal and helping.

God blesses Antioch churches with great resources in order to bless others. Apostles and apostolic churches have a grace to distribute (Acts).

To distribute means to disperse, spread, scatter and administer. These churches will be marked by their supernatural giving.

8. Prophetic Ministry

And in those days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. Now there were in the church that was in Antioch certain prophets and teachers (Acts 11:27; 13:1).

Antioch churches respect and receive prophetic ministry. The prophetic and teaching anointing were dominant gifts in the Antioch church.

There were a group of prophets and teachers ministering together in the church at Antioch. Prophetic ministry strengthens and confirms the believer. It brings revelation and refreshing to the church.

This unique combination of prophets and teachers provided an atmosphere for the release of apostolic teams. They both release the word of the Lord. When the word of the Lord is strong in a local church, it will create an atmosphere for the release of the plans and purposes of God. Antioch churches are prophetic, teaching churches. When prophets and teachers come together as a team, get ready for an apostolic release.

Prophets should be a part of every local church. We are commanded to let the prophets speak (1Cor.14). Antioch churches will have a company of prophets and prophetic people. The prophetic word releases life.

Prophetic input keeps these churches fresh and on the cutting edge of what God is doing. The prophetic ministry is strong in these churches because prophets are honored and received. People are changed when they come into contact with a company of prophets. As prophets prophesy and minister the Spirit of God is released over the lives of those who are ministered to.

People are lifted to new levels. The prophetic word activates and initiates people into their destinies. The word is creative and releases the plans and purposes of God.

Prophets along with apostles bring revelation to the church (Eph 3:5). They also lay a foundation (Eph 2:20). Antioch churches will have believers strong in revelation and foundation. They will have insight into the plans and purposes of God as a result of prophetic ministry.

9. Plurality of Leadership (Presbytery)

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

Notice the leadership combination at Antioch. The team at Antioch was unique. They had professionals, dignitaries and strong ministry gifts in their leadership teams.

Barnabas had been a Levitical priest where as Saul was highly educated in the ways of Judaism. Manaen was brought up in the courts of Herod the tetrarch. Simeon was called Niger which means black.

In America, we live in a multicultural society. Many of our cities are cosmopolitan, and having a variety of cultures coming into contact. Diversity is the norm. Antioch represents a church that does not discriminate based on color or background. The leadership in Antioch represents a multicultural mix that represents the Kingdom of God.

The anointing upon a persons life is received in an Antioch church. Their gift is respected. They are challenged to fulfill their destinies and are taught to overcome their cultural barriers. They are not judged in the natural, but discerned in the spirit. People are not held back by the insecurities and prejudice of leadership. Cultural bias has been broken by a spirit of love and unity.

Apostolic churches receive people based upon their gifting and character, rather than upon race or culture. The spirit of racism and discrimination is broken in an Antioch church.

People are attracted to these churches because of the anointing and the apostolic spirit that is within them. These churches will attract people of all backgrounds because they are Kingdom churches. They manifest the Kingdom of God which is above our particular culture and people group.

Antioch churches will be places where people can receive training and be released as leaders. Leaders are developed in an Antioch church. They are raised up quickly. As Barnabas and Paul ministered in Antioch we see a group of leaders being raised up quickly. People are challenged to rise up quickly. People are challenged to rise up and embrace their calling.

They are expected to fulfill these callings and obey the Lord. All gifts are recognized in these churches. They have a revelation of the importance of all the gifts and ministries.

There is a plurality of leadership in Antioch churches. Plurality is what gives these churches strength. They are not limited to one or a few gifts. They understand the blessing of diversity and abundance. A team of prophets and teachers at Antioch birthed a strong apostolic move. This is the key to birthing and releasing strong apostolic moves throughout the Earth.

10. Ministering to the Lord

As they ministered to the lord and fasted (Acts 13:2).

The Antioch church is characterized by ministry to the Lord. There is a spirit of worship in these churches. Worship releases the spirit of prophecy (Rev.19:10). It provides an atmosphere to hear the voice of God. As they fasted they developed sensitivity to the Holy Spirit. Fasting is the Biblical way of humbling oneself (Psalm 35). As we humble ourselves we receive grace.

Although this was a church of grace, they continued to receive more grace through fasting and ministering to the Lord. Apostolic grace was released. This was a sending grace. They were able to hear the voice of God and release two of their most notable ministers for apostolic ministry.

Fasting and prayer has always been a way to minister to the Lord. Anna ministered to the Lord in this way for many years (Luke 2:36-38). Her ministry was a part of bringing in the Messiah. She was a part of birthing deliverance for Israel and the world. Churches that minister to the Lord in fasting and prayer will be a part of birthing new ministries. As prophets and teachers ministered to the Lord and fasted the apostolic ministry of Barnabas and Paul were released.

Ministering to the Lord is important in Antioch churches. To minister means to wait upon. They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. Antioch believers wait upon the Lord for direction. Their obedience comes out of hearing the voice of the Lord. They are sensitive to God's voice. They cherish the voice of the Lord and realize the importance of ministering to the Lord.

11. Prayer and Fasting

And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away (Acts 13:3).

Prayer is the power source of the apostolic. Prayer releases the apostolic anointing. Prayer causes God to "send forth" laborers into the harvest. The apostles gave themselves to prayer

and the ministry of the word (Acts 13:3).

Prayer is the power source of the apostolic. Prayer releases the apostolic anointing. Antioch churches pray without ceasing (1Thess5:17). They are strong in corporate prayer (Acts 4:31). They labor in prayer (Col.4:12). They pray with the spirit and with the understanding (Cor.14:15).

Fasting is also part of apostolic ministry (2Cor.11:27). Fasting is an act of humility. It is a declaration in the spirit that we are entirely dependent upon God. Sent ones are dependent upon the sender. Their power and authority come from the sender.

Antioch churches are houses of prayer. They are strong bases of prayer and intercession. Prayer and fasting is the power source of the apostolic ministry.

These are supernatural weapons that destroy strongholds of darkness. Leadership is released through prayer and fasting. Elders are ordained through prayer and fasting. Great power and anointing is released through prayer and fasting.

The level of power and anointing is high in an Antioch church because of prayer and fasting. The leadership is committed to prayer and fasting. The result will be signs, wonders, and miracles on a consistent basis. Prayer and fasting is a way to break open difficult territories. It is a platform in which strong ministries are built.

Fasting gives Antioch churches the ability to build the old waste places. They establish the foundations of many generations. They become the repairers of the breach and the restorer of paths to dwell in (Isaiah. 58:6, 12).

12. Sending Church (releasing)

And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away (Acts 13:3). The prophets and teachers at Antioch responded to the Holy Spirit and send out an apostolic team consisting of Barnabas and Paul. The Antioch church is a sending church. Apostolic people and churches revolve around the concept of sending and being sent.

Antioch became an apostolic mission base for developing and releasing apostolic teams. The Biblical pattern of planting and building churches is through apostolic teams.

Apostolic teams give the local church the ability to reach out beyond their region into other regions and nations. Churches are then able to impact other regions and territories.

From Antioch was a key to the establishing of the strategic churches of Corinth, Ephesus, Thessalonica and Philippi. These churches in turn became governing churches that affected other regions and territories. A church success should not be measured by how many come in but also by how many are released and sent out. Antioch has a sending mentality and understanding of the fulfilling of the Great Commission requires sending.

God the Father sends. Jesus sends. The Holy Spirit sends. The church sends. Sending is part of the strategy of the Godhead, and it should also be a part of the strategy of the church. The apostolic spirit is a sending spirit. Antioch churches will develop a strategy for developing and releasing apostolic teams.

Antioch churches have a “sending” mentality. They do not attempt to keep all the gifts and

anointing inside the local church. They are quick to hear the voice of God and to release those who God says to release. They become sending stations that release the anointing of God throughout the Earth.

Churches are planted and nations are affected. One of the greatest joys is to become a sender. God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all senders. This is the very nature of the Godhead. Antioch churches will have this nature. They are partakers of the divine nature. They operate with the mentality of the Godhead.

Antioch churches know the importance of sending. They have a strategy that incorporates sending. They are able to extend their borders by releasing teams to the nations. The teams sent out operate in the authority of the sending church.

They are backed by the prayers and finances of the local church. Without sending the church will not be able to fulfill the great Commission.

Antioch churches are churches of impact because they are sending churches. They send out ministries in obedience to the voice and direction of the Holy Spirit. Their success is dependent upon obeying the Lord in sending. They do not hold back from releasing and sending.

They operate in the cycle of training and releasing. When leaders are trained and released, new ones are raised up to replace them. There is a continual reproduction, which is a Kingdom principle.

This is the precise pattern God intends for the local church today. Through training, teaching, discipleship and relationship, God begins to empower by the Holy Spirit individuals in preparation for greater service this is the natural progression of spiritual things.

God sends someone out to allow someone else to step into a place of service and leadership. The church in Antioch was a dynamic, powerful church. God's grace abounded. In the church at Antioch, a revised model for the expansion of the Kingdom of God is found,

This is most clearly presented in the 13th chapter of the book of Acts. In this chapter Barnabas, Saul and the church take another step in their journey, building the type of church God really desires.

Here is the beginning of the five-fold ministry in action, in support of the development of the local church, and the sending forth of apostolic team for church planting. (Stan DeKoven)

