

Back to the Future

discerning God's purpose for our life as His church

Every so often it's important to pause and take stock. How are we doing? What are we seeking to accomplish? Are we growing, making progress?

Such seasons of 'reflection' are as important in our communal life as a local church as they are in our individual lives.

This series of studies aims to provide a focus for such a season, a chance to let the Word of God inform our understanding of all that he calls us as His church to be and to be doing in these days of great turbulence and change.

You can find the background to this short series [here](#).

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1. An 'accident waiting to happen'!

(Acts 11.19-21)

[w/b Sunday 12th January 2020]

".. The Lord's hand was with them .."

You could argue with some justification that the planting of a church in Antioch was an 'accident waiting to happen'. It was an 'accident', of course, only in the sense that clearly it was not part of any strategic planning on behalf of the early church's leaders - but if in those terms it was an 'accident', it was certainly one that was 'waiting to happen': God was working out His sovereign purpose in accordance with what He'd promised!

For God had been committed from the start to the proclamation of the gospel to the 'gentile' world: and He would make sure that it happened! In this first study we'll look largely at the background to the establishing of the church in Antioch.

[Although there are 7 questions, your Community Group may choose to concentrate on just some of them. Key questions in this study are probably 1, 4 and 7. As always try to leave good time for shared prayer!]

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1. **Read Acts 11.19-30.** These verses will give you an initial feel for the remarkable growth of this church which would prove to be such an important 'bridgehead' into the gentile world.

Should we expect such 'growth' today in the work of the gospel?

What indications are we given of both *numerical* growth and *spiritual* growth in this picture of the Antioch church?

2. Read Luke 24.45-49 and Acts 1.4-8. There's a background to the establishing of the church at Antioch with which it's helpful to be familiar.

Our calling as Jesus' followers is essentially to be His 'witnesses': what does it mean to be His 'witness'?

The Jews had forgotten or chosen to ignore the fact that the scope of God's promise had always included 'all peoples on earth' (Gen.12.3): in what respects do you think that we, too, can lose sight of that sort of 'all-inclusive' perspective?

3. Read Acts 8.1-8. The preaching of the gospel in Samaria is set against the background of Jesus' words in Acts 1.8: it was through persecution that this significant step was taken.

The painful experience of 'great persecution' was the trigger for the first major expansion of the gospel: can you think of similar times in your life when a painful or uncomfortable experience has (in hindsight) proved to be a wise and kind providence of God?

Why do you think Stephen's death triggered such a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem?

4. Read Acts 8.1-8. For all the many centuries of hostility that marked relationships between Jews and Samaritans, the latter nonetheless displayed a remarkable receptivity to the gospel.

V.4 is key -"*.. those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went*": would this be true of us (of you) in the face of persecution?

And if not, can you put your finger on why that's the case?

Read Acts 6.3-5: how can we ensure that we are “*full of faith and of the Holy Spirit*”?

5. Read Acts 11.19. Luke records for us how the message of the gospel first reached the city of Antioch, the 3rd largest city of the Roman Empire (after Rome and Alexandria).

Why do you think these believers proclaimed the message “*only among Jews*” to start with?

When it comes to sharing the gospel with others, are you similarly restricted, only speaking to certain people about Jesus? Are there people with whom, culturally, you’re disinclined to ‘spread the word’?

6. Read Acts 11.20. This verse narrates a huge step forward in the progress of the gospel, and the start of a whole new significant chapter in the story of the church.

Why do you think these Jewish believers started speaking ‘to Greeks also’?

What might you learn from this for yourself?

7. **Read Acts 11.21.** Once the message about Jesus was out, the result was remarkable with a great number of people coming to faith.

According to Luke's narrative here, what are the hallmarks of conversion?

Key to all that happened was the fact that "*the Lord's had was with them*": how can we ensure that the Lord's hand is with **us**?