

## Acts 13.<sup>1-12</sup>

### ‘May the peoples praise You, Lord’

#### Background

What Luke had recorded in Acts 8, namely the conversion of the Ethiopian official, is the precursor to the great expansion of the gospel to the nations of the world. What happened at the individual level in the case of the Ethiopian becomes the pattern of the Lord’s working on a much larger canvas.

Antioch was the platform from which the gospel would be taken to the Gentile world. It was a strategic centre of population. After Rome itself and Alexandria it was the third most important (and populous) city in the Roman Empire: like Rome and Alexandria, Antioch was a cosmopolitan city, and located as it was at the north-west corner of the Mediterranean Sea it was geographically (as well as politically and culturally) in an ideal place for the message about Jesus to be spread far and wide.

It was, of course, very different from Jerusalem! And one of the challenges which the early church faced arose from the need to adapt their structures and models of ministry to the very different cultural context and soil into which the message was to be taken and in which the church was to be planted.

Some space is, therefore, given by Luke in his narrative of the early church to the way in which the church at Antioch was rooted and shaped by the Lord, in such a manner that the body of believers there was in a condition to be a ‘sending’ church. The latter half of [Acts 11](#) along with the early verses of [Acts 13](#) provide an instructive window onto the development, and the distinctive features, of the Antiochene church.

There are lessons, clearly, for us all to learn.

How – without compromising Biblical truth at all – how can the patterns and structures of ministry best be adapted to the setting of a society here in Scotland (and Aberdeen not least) which is now far more markedly multi-national and multi-cultural than it was, say 50 years ago: and far more Biblically illiterate, too, of course, resulting in a population unfamiliar with, and often antagonistic towards, the values, norms and perspective of the Judaeo-Christian Scriptures.

Or put more simply, how are ‘the peoples’ (the Gentile world) to be helped to praise the Lord (see [Psalm 67.5](#))?

Taking the message to the ends of the earth and making disciples of all nations may be an exciting prospect, a heady adventure, a noble aspiration: but it also throws up considerable challenges and takes us all right out of our ‘comfort zones’. Luke’s account through these chapters demonstrates that the early believers were up for the challenge and shows how they went about addressing the challenge.

There will be profit, therefore, in your at least having a look at the full set of readings ([Acts 11.19-30](#) and [13.1-12](#)). ‘Days’ (5), (6) and (7) are probably the ones on which to concentrate: the earlier passages relate more to the necessary background, whereas the section from 12.25-13.12 focusses on the ‘launch’ of the Gentile mission and a church equipped to take the message to the nations. You’ll find additional questions, accordingly, in relation to those three ‘days’.

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## 1) Monday 30<sup>th</sup> May – providence

Read [Acts 11.19-21](#)

*“.. the Lord’s hand was with them ..”* (Acts 11.21)

Persecution was painful for the believers thereby scattered – but providential also. God used it as a further means whereby the good news about Jesus was taken to the nations. Dark days for believers may yet prove to be good days for the Kingdom.

How would you explain ‘the good news about the Lord Jesus’ in a sentence or two?

What instances have you known of the Lord turning something which seemed like a backward step into a huge step forward?

**Prayer:** *As I give myself once more to the service of Your kingdom, grant me, Lord, that Spirit-given instinct that can tell that You are on the field when You are most invisible.*

## 2) Tuesday 31<sup>st</sup> May – grace

Read [Acts 11.22-24](#)

*“When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done ..”* (Acts 11.23)

As Jesus could only do what He saw His Father doing ([Jn.5.19](#)), so Barnabas in a new situation was concerned to discern, through the Holy Spirit, what the Lord in His grace had been doing in this new chapter in the progress of His work. Keep your eyes open!

Do you tend towards criticism when things aren’t quite as you’d expected or been accustomed to – or are you quick to encourage others?

How have you been helped to remain ‘true to the Lord’ since trusting in Him?

**Prayer:** *I pray for those who’ve newly come to trust in You, Lord Jesus, thanking You for the vibrancy of their faith: help them to stand firm in the cause of the gospel.*

## 3) Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> June – sequel

Read [Acts 11.25-26](#)

*“.. Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul ..”* (Acts 11.26)

Barnabas not only saw what the Lord had been doing, he saw also what the sequel would entail. A message with distinctly Jewish roots was being spread by the Lord to the Gentile world: a Jew who was also a Roman citizen, was the man for the moment!

As you assess your present circumstances and what the Lord is doing, can you see what the 'next steps' are to which the Lord may be leading you?

In what ways is your life so manifestly and distinctively centred on Jesus that those around you would describe you in terms of your relationship with Him?

**Prayer:** *You have called me, my God, to walk humbly with You. Help me today to keep in step with Your Spirit, neither rushing ahead nor lagging behind.*

#### **4) Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> June – Word**

Read [Acts 11.27-30](#)

*"The disciples, as each one was able decided to provide help .." (Acts 11.29)*

The Word of God is transformative. The Spirit-empowered ministry of God's word, didactically through Barnabas and Saul, and prophetically through Agabus, effected in the believers a Christ-like generosity of spirit in affording practical help to others.

In what ways might you, or your church, show a similar generosity towards other believers today?

Are you sufficiently proactive (rather than just reactive) in the ways in which you respond to the needs of others?

**Prayer:** *How wonderful it is that before we call upon You, Lord, You are already answering ([Is.65.24](#)): prompt me by Your Spirit as to whose needs I may serve today.*

#### **5) Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> June – leaders**

Read [Acts 12.25-13.1](#)

*".. in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers .." (Acts 13.1)*

The Lord equips His church for the challenges and opportunities she'll face. The next generation of leaders was already emerging, being raised up by the Lord to serve the cause of the gospel and spread His Word. God is growing His work!

**How many different nationalities are you aware of in your fellowship?**

**What 'cultural' differences have you become aware of among fellow church members?**

What are the blessings and what are the difficulties of a 'multicultural' church?

To what extent should church leaders take the initiative in taking younger Christians under their wings?

**Prayer:** *The harvest may be plentiful, Lord, but the workers today are few. Raise up a fresh generation of godly leaders who will bring Your Word to our nation today.*

## 6) Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> June – sent

Read [Acts 13.2-5](#)

“.. the two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit ..” (Acts 13.4)

Jesus, Himself sent by the Father, sends His people out to share in His expanding work ([Jn.20.21](#)). We are a sent people. In the context of ministry of the Word ([13.1](#)) and the worship of His people ([13.2](#)), that call of the Lord is made clear by His Holy Spirit.

To what extent do you live out your daily life as one who’s been *sent* by Jesus?

How would you describe ‘the work to which’ the Holy Spirit has called you?

‘Sending’ is a core component of our life as a church (it’s the ‘S’ in our SCTS acronym): how did the ‘sending’ happen at Antioch, and what lessons might we profitably learn from that?

Do you know how many missionaries we have ‘sent’? How many we regularly support both financially and prayerfully? Do you know who they are?

How does the Holy Spirit speak, with the sort of ‘immediacy’ we see here, into the life of Christ’s church today?

**Prayer:** *I am Your servant, Lord: give me grace to follow where You lead, to go where You send, and to do what You say, and to speak what You command ([Jer.1.7f](#)).*

## 7) Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> June – hungry

Read [Acts 13.6-12](#)

“.. because he wanted to hear the word of God ..” (Acts 13.7)

The missionary journey was hardly underway before they were meeting a man eager to hear God’s word. The world is seeking meaning and purpose. There is for believers ‘a great door for effective work’ – but there’ll be many who oppose you ([1 Cor.16.9](#)).

How were your eyes opened to see the truth of the gospel, prompting you to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ?

What means are used today to turn people away from the faith?

What was the ‘teaching about the Lord’ at which the proconsul was ‘amazed’ and through which ‘he believed’?

In a thoroughly ‘visual’ age and culture what place should we be giving to the *visual demonstration* of the gospel? What might that look like? And how does that square with what Paul writes to the church at Corinth ([1 Cor.1.22-23](#))?

**Prayer:** *May there be many today who are drawn to hear Your Word, Lord. May that Word be read and preached with power and authority – and may many come to faith!*