



GROWTH GROUP SPRING 2019

FOCUSED: EXPERIENCING & EXPRESSING THE TRANSFORMING LOVE OF CHRIST
WEEK 1 – APRIL 28, 2019 - ACTS 11:19-21 AND NEHEMIAH 2:11-18

SETTING THE CONTEXT

For the next four weeks we are going to be taking an in-depth look at the church in Antioch, in Acts 11 and Acts 13, as well as utilizing other Scriptures from the Old and New Testament, to talk about the theme of “How We Experience and Express the Transforming Love of Jesus.” We want to look at the church at Antioch and see what we can learn from it. How was it formed? How did it understand its mission in the world? Where was it located? (Please see # 7 on the map.)

The city of Antioch was founded in 300 BC. It was absorbed into the Roman Empire in 64 BC and had an equal citizenship policy that was extended to Jews, as well as other foreigners and immigrants. As a result of this policy, Antioch became the third largest city in the Roman Empire with a population of around 500,000 people. It was called “Antioch the Beautiful,” as well as “the Queen of the East.” It was seen as the capital of the Imperial Province of Syria and its inhabitants included Latins, Greeks, Jews, Asians and Romans.

The message of salvation in Jesus Christ found tremendous popularity in Antioch. There were powerful business networks that connected Antioch with three continents and those networks also provided tremendous opportunities for the gospel message to literally go to the “ends of the world.”

The mission to the Gentiles began in earnest after the martyrdom of Stephen. In our text we find unnamed evangelists taking the gospel message to Antioch. Up until this point, most of the people being evangelized were Jewish. As we look at the church in Antioch, we find the gospel message being expanded geographically and culturally.

EXPLORING THE TEXT

Read Acts 11:19-21

¹⁹ Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. ²⁰ Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. ²¹ The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.



- 1) Pastor Paul talked about culture and context in his sermon on Sunday. As you think about our society and culture, and its relationship to the church, what changes have you seen in your lifetime?
- 2) Jesus had said the message would go from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria to the ends of the earth. We see this literally happening in Antioch, which was 300 miles north of Jerusalem. (Please see map.) People were coming to faith in Jesus Christ. Think about your own faith story. When did you first hear about Jesus? Was there a time when you remember making a decision to follow Jesus, or have you always followed Jesus?
- 3) Paul did not spend a lot of time in villages and small communities like Jesus did. Why do you think Paul and his teams focused on taking the message of Jesus to the cities of the Roman Empire, rather than the smaller villages and communities?
- 4) Have you ever felt that the Lord's hand was upon you? What did that feel like? Did it help encourage you in your faith?
- 5) As we think about our current context, do you think it is easier to communicate the message of Jesus Christ to people who have never heard about him (i.e. the community of Antioch, etc...), or do you think it is easier to share about Jesus with people who have some basic understanding (or misunderstanding) of him?

SETTING THE CONTEXT

The book of Nehemiah tells the story of the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem after they had been destroyed, in 586 BC. In Ezra, we read about the rebuilding of the temple and Nehemiah tells us about the work to rebuild the walls of the city. The first chapter tells us that before Nehemiah did anything he fasted and prayed, so that he would be prepared for the work God was calling him to do.

In chapter two, Nehemiah arrives in Jerusalem after King Artaxerxes had granted him permission to travel and rebuild the walls. He is there three days before he takes any action. Then he begins his journey at night, telling no one what he is doing and only takes the animal that he is riding upon.

Nehemiah goes around the city, examining what kind of shape the walls and gates of Jerusalem are in. He discovers that things are not looking good. If the people in Jerusalem are to be safe, then the walls need to be rebuilt. After observing all of this, he calls the people together and says it is time to rebuild the walls.

EXPLORING THE TEXT

Read Nehemiah 2:11-18

¹¹ I went to Jerusalem, and after staying there three days ¹² I set out during the night with a few others. I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem. There were no mounts with me except the one I was riding on. ¹³ By night I went out through the Valley Gate toward the Jackal[a] Well and the Dung Gate, examining the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken down, and its gates, which had been destroyed by fire. ¹⁴ Then I moved on toward the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was not enough room for my mount to get through; ¹⁵ so I went up the valley by night, examining the wall. Finally, I turned back and reentered through the Valley Gate. ¹⁶ The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, because as yet I had said nothing to the Jews or the priests or nobles or officials or any others who would be doing the work.

¹⁷ Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace." ¹⁸ I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me and what the king had said to me. They replied, "Let us start rebuilding." So they began this good work.

- 6) Nehemiah 2:12 makes it clear that God is the one who takes the first step. He gave Nehemiah a very clear message. Can you think of a time in your own life when you felt like God was giving you some kind of message? How did you respond?
- 7) Nehemiah waited three days before he took his first action, related to what God had put in his heart to do (Neh 2:11-12). Do you pause, before beginning a task God has put in your heart to do? How can slowing down, and "taking a couple of days," help in the work that God calls us to do?
- 8) Nehemiah went around and inspected the walls of Jerusalem before he began rebuilding. If people were to walk around our community or neighborhood what would they discover? What kinds of needs would they see? How do you see LJPC helping to meet those needs? Is there something your growth group could do this spring to help meet one of those needs?

13. The Missionary Journeys of the Apostle Paul

