

## ACTS: THE STORY CONTINUES

### Thursday Bible Study: From Jerusalem to Antioch

#### *Hearing James for the First Time*

#### Our Journey Today

- Orienting – Where we are in the Narrative
  - Peter went to Cornelius and preached the Gospel – His whole household was saved and filled with the Spirit
  - Peter explains God's work among the Gentiles to the Jerusalem church  
(Acts 11:1–18)
- ***Now, Luke brings us back into the story of Acts Chapter 8 – what happened to the believers who were scattered after Stephen's execution, and Saul's persecution??***

***Acts 11:19 - "Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus."***

Luke now returns to the story he first introduced in Acts 8.

- Stephen had preached the gospel to the Jews in Jerusalem, and many believed, but those who disputed with him, stirred up opposition.
  - Stephen ended up on trial before the Sanhedrin and was stoned to death
  - After his death, Saul of Tarsus went on a rampage – dragging men and women from their homes and committing them to prison and death
  - Christians fled from the persecution into all the surrounding regions...
- Luke had then turned to Saul's conversion and how the Gospel went to the Gentiles

- While Peter, Philip, and Saul were each experiencing God's work in different places, the gospel continued spreading through ordinary believers who had been forced to leave Jerusalem.

**Now Luke takes us north – Above Caesarea into the area of Phoenecia and it's cities Tyre and Sidon, the island of Cyprus, and the area of Syria and it's principle city, Antioch...**

- **Luke then focuses in on Antioch, where the beginnings of a powerful work of God was taking shape in the form of a multi-ethnic Church**
  - **Imagine Yourself There:**
    - You have fled your home because of persecution.
    - You arrive in Antioch... a city unlike anything you have ever known.
  - **Antioch was one of the largest cities in the Roman Empire**
    - A crossroads of nations.
      - Jews were given equal status in Antioch
      - Other nations were given the same invitation and opportunity
      - It was a city of great diversity
      - It's population was 300,000 – 500,000 (maybe more)
    - A place of opportunity... both wealth and poverty
    - A place of temptation – Daphne, a suburb of Antioch, was only 5 miles to the south –
      - a place of night life, sexual promiscuity, entertainment, and loose morals.
    - Antioch was a place where followers of Jesus must learn how to remain faithful in an unfamiliar world.
- **Then... A letter arrives from Jerusalem.**

- It is written by James... the brother of Jesus, and leader of the Jerusalem church.
- Today, rather than studying the letter one paragraph at a time... we will hear it the way those first believers likely heard it... **read aloud together – as a letter addressed to people just like them**
- **As You Listen**, ask yourself...
  - What encouragement would I need if I had been one of these scattered believers?
  - What themes keep appearing throughout the letter?
  - What does James seem most concerned about?
  - What does this letter reveal about following Christ in a difficult world?

**Read James 1:1**

- **As you listened to James' letter, what thoughts went through your mind?**
- **What stood out to you?**
- **What does James seem the most concerned about?**
- **Does reading the letter in its context help you to better understand it's message?**

**Key Thought**

**God often scatters His people geographically so that His Kingdom may spread spiritually. Wherever He places us, He calls us to faithful obedience.**

# **Antioch of Syria**

## **Where the Nations Meet**

Nearly three hundred miles north of Jerusalem, beyond the hills of Galilee and across the broad valleys of Syria, the road gradually descends toward one of the great cities of the Roman world.

Long before its streets come into view, Mount Silpius commands the horizon.

Its steep slopes rise like a great stone wall behind the city, while below, the Orontes River winds through a wide and fertile valley before continuing toward the Mediterranean. Roads converge from every direction. From the north they descend through the mountain passes of Cilicia. From the east come caravans laden with goods from Mesopotamia and beyond. To the west, the nearby port of Seleucia opens Antioch to the commerce of the sea. Even before entering its gates, one senses that this is a place where nations naturally meet.

Within the city, the movement never seems to cease.

Merchants unload goods from distant provinces. Roman officials pass beneath long colonnades. Soldiers make their rounds through crowded streets. Craftsmen labor in open workshops while travelers from every corner of the empire bargain in busy marketplaces. Greek is heard almost everywhere, yet Latin, Aramaic, Hebrew, and Syriac mingle freely among the voices of the crowd. Few cities gather so many peoples, languages, and cultures into one place.

A broad paved boulevard forms the city's spine. Covered colonnades shelter pedestrians from both the heat of summer and the rains of winter, while public buildings, marketplaces, fountains, and elegant homes testify to Antioch's prosperity. Yet only a few streets away, crowded neighborhoods are filled with laborers, immigrants, widows, refugees, and tradesmen seeking to build new lives in one of the empire's greatest cities.

Among these diverse communities stands a large and well-established Jewish population.

For generations they have built synagogues, taught the Scriptures, and preserved the worship of the God of Israel far from Jerusalem. Each Sabbath, the Law and the Prophets are read aloud to Jews and to many Gentiles who have come to revere Israel's God. Long before followers of Jesus arrive, the soil has already been prepared.

Yet Antioch's greatness is accompanied by its temptations.

Just beyond the southern edge of the city lies Daphne, celebrated throughout the Roman world for its magnificent groves and temples. Pilgrims come seeking beauty, pleasure, and

worship, but the sanctuary has become equally famous for its immorality, drunken festivals, and ritual prostitution. The influence of Daphne reaches well beyond its precincts, reminding every resident that wealth, culture, and sophistication do not necessarily produce holiness.

Nor is Rome's presence easily forgotten.

Imperial officials govern the province from Antioch, soldiers regularly patrol its streets, and memories remain fresh of the recent crisis under Emperor Caligula, whose attempt to place his image in the Temple at Jerusalem nearly ignited revolt throughout the Jewish world. Even here, far from Judea, the tension between the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of men is never far from view.

It is into this remarkable city that scattered believers begin to arrive.

Driven from Jerusalem by the persecution that followed Stephen's death, they come with little more than the gospel of Jesus Christ. Luke records no grand strategy, no carefully organized missionary enterprise, and no apostolic commission directing their steps. They simply travel north, carrying with them the message of the risen Christ.

In one of the largest, wealthiest, most influential—and spiritually challenging—cities of the Roman Empire, the hand of the Lord is with them.

# The World of the Early Church

ACTS 10-12

## A CONNECTED FAMILY

Across cities and roads, by land and sea, Jesus was building one Church—one people, many places, connected by the Spirit.

- **Peter**  
Joppa → Caesarea → Jerusalem
- **Believers Scattered (Acts 11:19)**  
Jerusalem → Phoenicia → Antioch
- **Barnabas**  
Jerusalem → Antioch  
Antioch → Tarsus → Antioch
- **Paul**  
Jerusalem → Caesarea → Tarsus

- **Primary City**  
Center of ministry and mission
- **Secondary City**  
Other important city
- ⚓ **Major Harbor**
- 🏠 **Early Church / Believers**
- **Roman Road (Via Maris)**  
Major coastal highway
- - - **Other Roads**  
Regional connections



CILICIA

Tarsus

Tarsus  
Paul's Home  
A major city of  
learning and trade.

Antioch of Syria

Antioch  
Missionary Church  
Where believers were  
first called Christians.

SYRIA

Damascus

Damascus  
A major city on ancient  
trade routes.

Mediterranean  
Sea

Caesarea  
Maritima

Caesarea Maritima  
Roman Capital & Great Harbor  
A center of government,  
military power, and trade.

Joppa (Jaffa)

Joppa  
Ancient Jewish Harbor  
A peaceful port and a  
gateway to the nations.

JUDEA

Jerusalem

Jerusalem  
Mother Church  
The heart of God's  
redemptive plan.

SAMARIA

Sebastia  
(Samaria)

GALILEE

Capernaum

Sea of  
Galilee

Canā

Nazareth

Lydda  
(Lod)

Emmaus

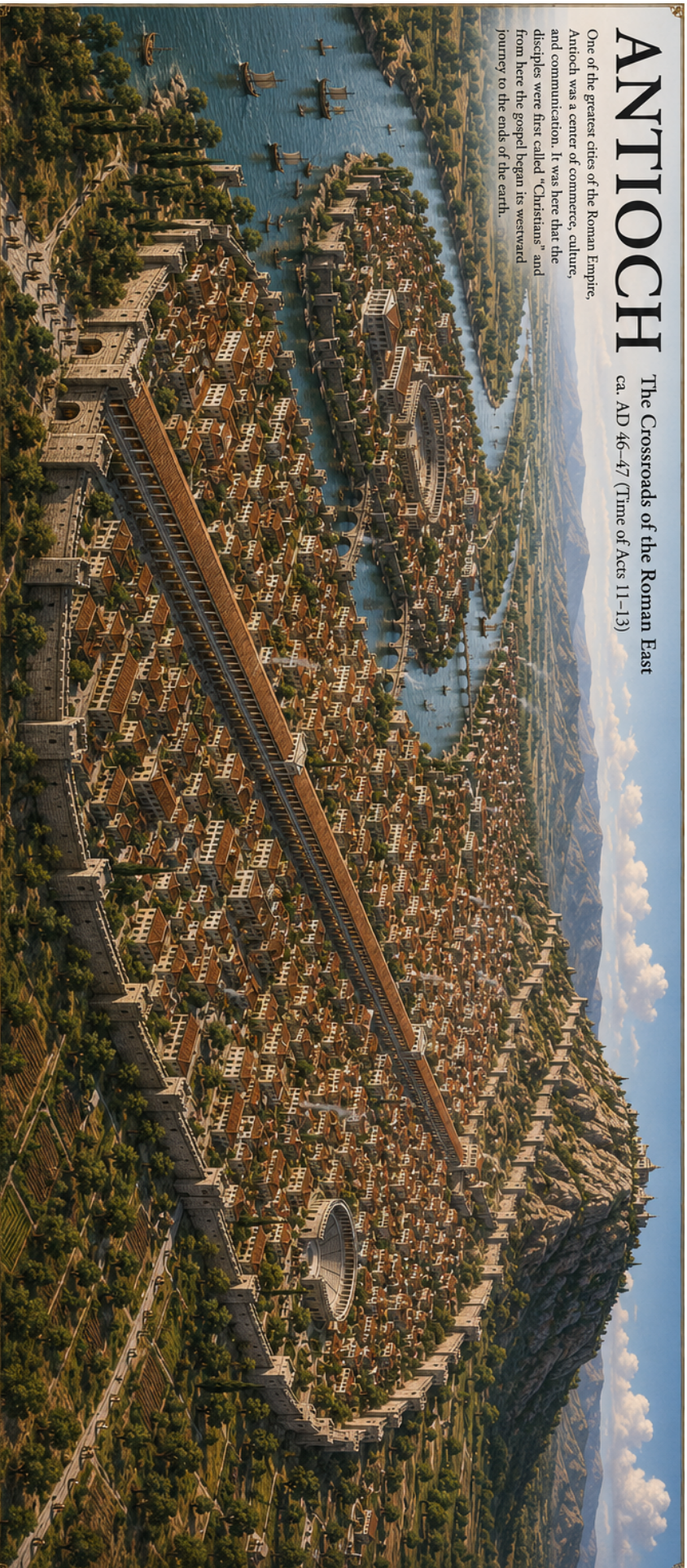
Bethlehem

Gaza

# ANTIOCH

The Crossroads of the Roman East  
ca. AD 46–47 (Time of Acts 11–13)

One of the greatest cities of the Roman Empire, Antioch was a center of commerce, culture, and communication. It was here that the disciples were first called “Christians” and from here the gospel began its westward journey to the ends of the earth.



1. THE GREAT COLONNADED STREET



Antioch's famous street, built and beautified by Herod the Great, was roofed and colonnaded to protect from sun and rain. Shops, offices, and markets lined both sides.

2. BRIDGE OVER THE ORONTES



Several bridges connected the island district to the mainland, enabling trade, travel, and the flow of people.

3. VIEW TOWARD MOUNT SILPIUS



Mount Silpius rose behind the city, crowned by temples and fortifications. The walls climbed the slopes to the citadel on the summit.

4. ROAD LEADING WEST



The road followed the Orontes Valley westward to Seleucia Pieria and the Mediterranean Sea, the gateway for the gospel to the wider world.

## KEY FACTS

- Population: 300,000–500,000+ • Founded: 300s BC by Seleucus I Nicator • Province: Syria • Language: Greek (common) • Major River: Orontes
- Notable Features: Island District, Great Colonnaded Street (Stoa Megale), Bridges, Hippodrome, Theater, City Walls