

# Antioch Gathering 2009



For a week, from 10th to 17th October, 2009, 72 Christian leaders from around the world gathered in Seleucia, the ancient sea port of the biblical Antioch (Acts 13:4) and the historic stepping stone of Paul's apostolic missions. The purpose was to seek fresh answers and a new awareness from God about the status and future of the remaining task Jesus has left his followers with, to disciple all the nations of the world. This summary report attempts to condense some of the themes we found ourselves facing, either hearing from God, or as we heard from each other (or both).

Rather than focussing on strategy issues (facts, numbers, methods) many of us felt God wanted to call together a token group of people in order to share what is on his heart at this decisive hour in the history of Missions. In order not to drown out God's voice by our own strong opinions and preconceived convictions, we knew that the main speaker had to be God himself. This called for a rather unusual conference format. Instead of the classical line-up of speakers on current subjects and projects we needed to make space for God to have his voice heard, and attempt to facilitate a process of corporately seeking God's face for whatever is on his heart right now. Rather than crying out to God: "Please do something for us!", we needed to hear what we can do for him. This required a new and tough discipline from all of us. It would be so easy to come to God simply presenting our ideas, plans and agendas; we knew that we had to go beyond that and learn to do what he is blessing, not have him bless what we are doing. The challenge was in grasping his *ways*, not only his *works*, and learn to align our hearts, motives and ultimately our agendas with God – and with each other. The Antioch Gathering had three distinctive parts: first, coming corporately before God and learn to listen where he thinks we are on his map; a trip to Tarsus, the place of "apostolic death" in the life of Paul; and finally a prophetic outlook into the future of the remaining apostolic task.

## I. What did many of us sense God speak to us:

**Urgency.** Many sensed a great urgency, a "one minute to twelve" situation that defines the situation we are all in.

**Celebrate and repent.** Throughout Missions history, we have seen amazing advances and great breakthroughs which need to be celebrated. However, we also saw the deterioration of much of Missions into religious or even cultural colonialism, organized good deeds and the expansion of narrow-minded denominationalism and the subsequent fragmentation of the Church. This has created "Missions made by man", a form of pseudo-Christian, religious expansionism, fragmented beyond recognition, where the proverbial left hand does not know any longer what the right hand is doing. The result is duplication, paralleling of programmes, the wasting of scarce finances, time and human resources. More dramatically, Missions made by man dared to take the mandate for Missions away from the Holy Spirit and declared a new mediator of Missions: the 40.000+ church and missions headquarters that exist globally. The world at large remains fairly unimpressed by this fractured thrust, Turkey, with almost as many missionaries as Turkish believers, being a prime example of this sad fact. For this, we seriously need to repent.

**Return to an old pattern for a new time.** In Antioch, at the birthplace of missions, the Holy Spirit initially spoke into an atmosphere of *corporate receptivity and collective obedience*. The very first mission journey occurred after Agabus prophesied "by the Spirit" a famine (Acts 11:28-30; Acts 12:25), and the believers responded by sending financial relief to Judea through Barnabas and Saul. Again, into an atmosphere of worship, prayer and fasting (Acts 13:1-3), the Holy Spirit called Barnabas and Saul for their second mission, commissioned by both the Holy Spirit and men "laying their hands on them".

The Mission mandate came directly from God (through prophecy), and was received and put into action in "quick, costly obedience", as one of the participants of the Antioch Gathering put it.

As many of the shared testimonies showed, very clearly a new and possibly final season of Missions has arrived. "The New" is mainly characterized by a decisive return to the Kingdom of God as the home base of Missions. Some of the symptoms are: unheard of acceleration (as one example: in India, on the day of Pentecost 2009, more than 300.000 persons were baptized); the phenomenal and historic growth of house churches that are now beginning to make their own contribution to Missions; the re-emergence of prophetic and apostolic ministries; and a return to Kingdom economics – a life by the financial principles of the Kingdom, not the market.

This new season will require all of us to reassess what we are about and freshly realign ourselves with what God is currently doing, or we might miss a crucial and defining moment in the history of the Kingdom.

But first and foremost, it requires a **series of preparations**. God seemed to say to all of us: unless we prepare ourselves, we will not be able to play a significant role in these unfolding chapters of Kingdom history. Amongst them are:

**Travel lighter.** Far too many carry too much weight that God simply has not placed on their shoulders.

**Learn to listen before we act.** In a busy and fast world, listening to God's voice requires disciplined time-outs and the creation of agenda-less spaces so God can speak his heart, if he so wishes. God desires not only individuals, but a body to speak to, which, on our side, requires corporate listening, hearing God's voice together, and discerning not only what he says, but what we therefore need to become and later do (being before doing). A group of leaders that, for the lack of a better word is called "Listening Group", has come together several times since 2007 for typically three days in a row to learn to listen together. The group helped to steer a part of the Antioch Gathering to avoid jumping too quickly to conclusions, and help carry the creative tension between prophetic tarrying and apostolic action. The ultimate goal of listening together is that we can again become "pillar-people", reminding us of the people of Israel in the desert that only moved when the pillar of fire and the pillar of cloud (Ex. 13:21) moved. Otherwise they rather tarried on the spot, waiting for new and clear instructions.

**Abandon false gospels and re-embrace the Gospel of the Kingdom.** The Kingdom is an invisible but very real political space ruled by Jesus the King that encompasses the entire created world – except the human race which is given a choice under whose rule to live life, Mammon or Jesus (Matth 6:24). Those humans that join and populate the Kingdom are the ones that are saved by grace, say farewell to Mammon and decide to place themselves voluntarily under his kingship in loving obedience, not merely saying "Lord, Lord" but doing what their King says. The Kingdom is essentially the domain of God's uncontested rule. As such it is a *disposition*, not a *destination*. "The gospel" was originally the news that there is a new king; the main message of Jesus was exactly that: he is our new King and we are all invited to live in the Kingdom, not any longer under the domain of darkness. This is the essence of the Gospel of the Kingdom. In the history of the Church three false while incomplete gospels have gradually replaced the Gospel of the Kingdom: a) the evangelistic gospel of "come ye and be saved"; b) the pastoral gospel of "come ye and be safe" by joining our church or group; and c) the gospel of the teachers and theologians that created doctrinal systems of truths that can be correct, but lifeless. It is of ultimate importance that The Gospel of The Kingdom is rescued from its historic obscurity and re-embraced and resonated by all that belong to Christ.

**If the Kingdom of God is to come, ours has to go.** The three kingdoms that most violently fight against the Kingdom of God is a) the kingdom of self, our own drivenness by selfish ambition, a career mindset and the idea "what is in it for me"; b) our primary identity in the "kingdoms of we", groups, labels, organizations or denominations that displaces everything else, including the Kingdom of God, to a rank of secondary priority; and c) the kingdom of nationalism, tribalism and patriotism, where our sworn or felt allegiance to an ethnic group, a political expression or a political preference stands in the way of our primary citizenship in the Kingdom.

**A new authority: from charisma to exousia.** The current level of spiritual authority in the church is far too much based on *charisma* (gift, ability), in which people are typically encouraged to function based on their personal giftings without the proper legitimization (*exousia*) that comes by accurately functioning within the framework of the Kingdom. The Kingdom of God is no democracy or even anarchy that boasts a permissiveness where everyone can do what he likes, when he likes, if he likes. The secret to the spiritual authority of Jesus was not to free-flow in his charismatic gifting, but to only do what he saw the father doing and to only speak what he heard the father speak. The devil who tempted Jesus in the desert to make him use his spiritual gifts for and on his own, outside a Kingdom framework, was utterly frustrated as Jesus basically told him that he would not function disconnected to his father but is absolutely bound to a higher reality, to the wishes of the father; he cannot and will not do as he could, but only as he should. This sets the standard for our own spiritual authority and calls for all of us seeking a level of authority that is not based on our charismatic gifting alone, but in the authenticity and legality (*exousia*) we are awarded as citizens and emissaries of the Kingdom.

**Deal with the "burnt earth syndrome".** The devil, in a diabolical attempt to intercept or at least corrupt and therefore discredit any new initiative of God has tried to "burn the earth" and create an atmosphere of distrust or even rejection of whatever new initiative God is causing. Seeking to mobilize immature believers and appealing to their desire for significance Satan has often created a smokescreen of distortion

that serves to confuse the body of Christ and immunize them against the real thing God is bringing. For example, before the larger Body of Christ could regain a healthy and balanced discipleship focus, wellmeaning movements like the “shepherding movement” in the 70s burnt trust, relationships and dampened the hope of many. Before a healthy prophetic or apostolic species is again seen as functioning accurately within a Kingdom framework, immature, uncrucified, unhealthy, flaky, selfappointed and selfsustained “prophets and apostles” and their organizational creations brought a large amount of mistrust into the wider Body of Christ, up to the degree that many have simply dismissed the prophetic or apostolic dimension of servanthood. Rather than resigning to this demonic strategy and pointing only to the damage and carnage it has brought, God is calling us to see through this satanic plan, deal decidedly with any hurt or suspicious residue in our hearts and move on to live God’s healthy original, life in the Kingdom, leaving behind a life of constant complaint, warning and pointing out what is missing. *Rather than being experts in regards to the problem, we need to live the solution.*

**A new level of unity.** It is a proper stage to begin our lives as servants of God. The unity amongst servants is often expressed in a “labor union”, a form of unity that is task oriented and makes sure the needs of the servants are heard and met. When Jesus said to his disciples: “You are my friends if you do as I say” he is inviting his former servants to step up into a more intimate relationship to him and each other. A society of friends lives a far deeper, relaxed and informal relationship, not only towards Jesus, but also towards each other. We sensed that Jesus, as a preparation for the decisive days to come, is inviting those that are already friends to step up into yet another level of unity, that comes out of being partners with Jesus because of our destination to become and act as his bride. Bride and bridegroom will need to learn to function at an eye to eye level and live out a love-based unity, where the body of Christ and Jesus, the head of the body, function again in sync to finish the apostolic tasks that Jesus began 2000 years ago.

## II. Who has not yet been to Tarsus?

Tarsus, the birthplace of the Apostle Paul, has not at all welcomed it’s most famous citizen of all times when he returned home a converted man. Paul did not come home with a big success story. He had even become a serious problem to the church that sent him home (Acts 9:30). Paul had believed that after his three years in the desert and Damascus, following his conversion, he would fit in with the other apostles, but he was obviously unaware of the fact that he, as a person, was still far too strong, forceful, argumentative and irrefuteable (in other words, immature, too much Paul, not enough Christ). His ministry did not cause conversions, but made his audience wanting him murdered (Acts 9:23 & 30). For eleven long years in Tarasus Paul went through a deep process of humiliation. From the perspective of his family and former community, he was neither fitting into his original place as a Jewish rabbi any longer, but he was even rejected and sent home by his own new “cult”. He was ignored, rejected, probably publicly flogged five times until he would say “I am dead; Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20) and “I discard everthything else, counting it as garbage” (Phil 3:8). Only after Barnabas called him away to Antioch, Paul left Tarsus as a changed man, utterly dead to the idea of showing off his apostolic role, establishing elitist apostolic clubs or even pseudo-apostolic kingdoms, or simply following his own immature ambition any longer. If a prophet does not count much in his home country, how much less does an apostle count in his home town? In this way, Tarsus had become an altar for a premature apostolic man, a place of death to his own visionary self, a place of apostolic preparation through a time where seemingly nothing happened. Only by enduring this stage of apostolic life as the ego-driven seed was falling into the ground and died, not rebelling against it or becoming bitter, God finally entrusted this man with a foundational apostolic work that changed this world forever. Visiting Tarsus in this spirit was like visiting an important stage in the maturing process of every follower of Christ. We dare not miss the importance of everyone of us “going to Tarsus” and dying to self, before we become engaged in the work God is calling us to do. Otherwise, too much of us and not enough of Christ will be built and planted into everything we do, and this has never been the way of the Kingdom.

## III. Outlook into the future of “Missions”

Ideally, all of us wishing to participate in Missions will need to accept that the Holy Spirit is not only the head and CEO of Missions, but we are to accept and respect each other as “commissioned agents” in the same Kingdom Mission. He still speaks and is in control, we follow his orders and are not in control. The prophetic scriptures of the Bible even speak of a time “in the last days” where “the word of the Lord will go forth from Zion” (Isa 2; Micha 4), where Jesus gives directives to those that want to hear them in order to complete the task. In practical terms this means that, for the final leg of the missionary initiative of God, our human Missions headquarters are going to fade in their significance, while the center of Missions will wander back to Jerusalem that becomes, yet again, the final place of commissioning, the last epicenter of Missions. This will not mean that Mt. Zion, a hill west of Jerusalem, will see the construction of an impressive Missions complex, but that God choose and foretold to reveal himself and his

directives in Zion “in the last days”. Some of us sensed that very soon God might be calling those from among the nations that he wants to come to Jerusalem to hear and implement his final decrees in regards to finalizing the apostolic Mission of the Kingdom.

How will this look like? Some of the facets of this we strongly felt about in Antioch were:

**“The Kingdom of God is right behaviour** (according to the constitution of the Kingdom), peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom 14:17). Rather than defining Missions in the very narrow terms of evangelism, soul winning and planting churches, what this world waits for is “the revelation of the sons of God”, the visible modelling of life in the Kingdom, the “city on the hill”, where the people can see good deeds and praise our father in heaven for them. This means that in every significant sphere of life – family, education, culture, business & finances as well as politics – the Kingdom needs to be first modelled and demonstrated, before anyone has the right to be publicly heard. Rather than copying secular models of life (like business or arts) and creating Christian versions of it, we need to pioneer expressions of life inspired and designed from the very beginning by the Kingdom of God. To act constitutionally, according to Kingdom principles, that, if needed, supersedes any political law, and to do so with peace and joy in a time where love grows cold and many people grow bitter, is the primary hallmark of Kingdom people. Mission shaped by the Gospel of the Kingdom therefore needs to be dramatically expanded in order to express life in the Kingdom in all areas of the arena of life, and no longer hide God’s light under a bowl (like a church building).

Some of the ways this will have to be expressed are:

**Missions flows primarily from divine fatherhood and sonship**, not the expansion of denominational spheres or the visions of individuals. From the time of Adam and Eve, there was a “baton of Missions”, a sense of missional responsibility passed on through the generations, moving through the hands of people like Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Josef, Moses, Joshua, David, Solomon, Jesus and his apostles until today. We sense there is an apostolic grandparents generation alive today that needs to let go of their agendas, give their heart (and the baton of responsibility) to the fathers, who will in turn pass it on to the young men, who will, in turn, pass it on to the children.

A **divine partnership between the apostolic and prophetic** will need to be forged in and across regions and apostolic jurisdictions so that apostolic-prophetic foundations can be laid in all areas of the globe.

**From the 12 to the 72.** Many of us have grown accustomed to working in “groups of 12”, smaller, intimate and even organic groups of leaders like Mission agencies, church planting thrusts or newer networks. Many of these groups have been given valuable experiences and insights, but need to face the reality that God is building Kingdom synergies over and beyond traditional Missions wineskins and is forming a *Metamission*, a level of Kingdom partnership in Missions goes beyond all our former alliances.

We need to learn dealing with the **“Keys of the Kingdom”** (Mt 16:19), a symbol of Kingdom authority to “lock and unlock” situations, gates, portals, demonic claims etc. For this we need to learn to function not in our own names or in the name of human organizations, but in corporate selflessness, in legal representation of the King, in other words, in the name of Jesus.

**Can the dove land somewhere?** God spoke to us about the prophetic significance of the dove landing on Noahs arc, bringing in the first fruit (an olive branch) after a time of judgement. Could it be that the age of Missions made by man is being graciously covered by the waters of God, and he is wanting to bless and therefore multiply the new fruits of a Kingdom shaped Mission? Just as Jesus was riding into Jerusalem on two donkeys, the mother donkey and her colt (representing the old religious system and the new wineskins?), the new moves of God seem to currently receive unprecedented anointing and blessing from God to multiply and “carry Jesus” into his destination.

Just as the Kingdom is a metacountry, God seems to be calling us to the formation of **“Kingdom Ministries”**, global competence groups that function like ministries of a particular government that draw together the best spirits and minds on the planet. Some of these ministries are:

A council of gifted men and women to re-define, promote and defend the “Gospel of the Kingdom”, as this is the core message of the Kingdom that cannot be watered down.

**Ministry of Women.** We know about the role of women in church-as-we-know-it, but the role of women in the Kingdom needs fresh definition, so that women are free to function not under the constraints of a religious church age, but within a healthy Kingdom framework.

**Ministry of family and education.** This entire arena needs to be rescued from secular and humanistic goals and shift from being market shaped (producing human resources for the workplace) to being Kingdom shaped (training humans to fulfill their Kingdom calling).

**Ministry of Kingdom economics.** The “World Economic Forum” in Davos brings together those excelling in a materialistic, market-driven economy. A global council on Kingdom Economics (in connection with regional councils) will have to start its work to formulate, express and help shape economic behaviour based on the Kingdom to introduce the nations of the world to the “radical original” of the economic wisdom of the Kingdom, providing God’s original to the flawed alternatives of Capitalism & Communism.

**Kingdom Media.** Rather than listening to one more Pastor X, TV Evangelist Y or teacher Z who raised the funds to put himself on TV, Kingdom content, particularly of apostolic and prophetic nature, needs to be aired in a way that introduces billions to the most well-kept secret of the planet: life in the Kingdom. In his brilliant communication strategy, Jesus used parables for everything he said to outsiders, but explained the secrets of the Kingdom only to insiders (Mk 4:10 & 11). Much of Christian media today does the exact opposite and attempts to preach plain text to those outside, while telling stories and parables to those inside. This media situation needs to be turned the right way up again and therefore calls for a new Kingdom synergy in media.

**Transport Ministry.** God is on the move, and many speak of the epicenter of Christianity, after having circled the globe westwards, moving decidedly from Asia “back to Jerusalem”. Interestingly enough, the ancient Silk Road from China to Jerusalem enters its last leg of the journey at the port of Antioch. Reflecting on this in our gathering in physical Antioch, we need to develop new logistical solutions (Kingdom logistics) to move *information* (including “war rooms” discerning prophetic intelligence for apostolic action), *money* (including regional apostolic foundations), *goods* (products, relief etc) and *personell* in such a way that it serves, and not obstructs, Kingdom expansion.

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PS: During the conference in Antioch, the PDF-version of the book „The Starfish Manifesto“ by Wolfgang Simson was released and is now ready for download at [www.starfishportal.net](http://www.starfishportal.net).  
A series of five TV shows on DVD, produced by the Finnish TV7 group, are soon available as the “Starfish Vision Series” on [www.starfishportal.net](http://www.starfishportal.net) as well.