

Acts 11:19—12:25 - January 17, 2021

Scripture, Outline, and Map

Scripture

11:19 Meanwhile, the believers who had been scattered during the persecution after Stephen's death traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch of Syria. They preached the word of God, but only to Jews. **20** However, some of the believers who went to Antioch from Cyprus and Cyrene began preaching to the Gentiles^[a] about the Lord Jesus. **21** The power of the Lord was with them, and a large number of these Gentiles believed and turned to the Lord.

22 When the church at Jerusalem heard what had happened, they sent Barnabas to Antioch. **23** When he arrived and saw this evidence of God's blessing, he was filled with joy, and he encouraged the believers to stay true to the Lord. **24** Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and strong in faith. And many people were brought to the Lord.

25 Then Barnabas went on to Tarsus to look for Saul. **26** When he found him, he brought him back to Antioch. Both of them stayed there with the church for a full year, teaching large crowds of people. (It was at Antioch that the believers^[b] were first called Christians.)

27 During this time some prophets traveled from Jerusalem to Antioch. **28** One of them named Agabus stood up in one of the meetings and predicted by the Spirit that a great famine was coming upon the entire Roman world. (This was fulfilled during the reign of Claudius.) **29** So the believers in Antioch decided to send relief to the brothers and sisters^[c] in Judea, everyone giving as much as they could. **30** This they did, entrusting their gifts to Barnabas and Saul to take to the elders of the church in Jerusalem.

12:1 About that time King Herod Agrippa^[d] began to persecute some believers in the church. **2** He had the apostle James (John's brother) killed with a sword. **3** When Herod saw how much this pleased the Jewish people, he also arrested Peter. (This took place during the Passover celebration.^[e]) **4** Then he imprisoned him, placing him under the guard of four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring Peter out for public trial after the Passover. **5** But while Peter was in prison, the church prayed very earnestly for him.

6 The night before Peter was to be placed on trial, he was asleep, fastened with two chains between two soldiers. Others stood guard at the prison gate. **7** Suddenly, there was a bright light in the cell, and an angel of the Lord stood before Peter. The angel struck him on the side to awaken him and said, "Quick! Get up!" And the chains fell off his wrists. **8** Then the angel told him, "Get dressed and put on your sandals." And he did. "Now put on your coat and follow me," the angel ordered.

9 So Peter left the cell, following the angel. But all the time he thought it was a vision. He didn't realize it was actually happening. **10** They passed the first and second guard posts and came to the iron gate leading to the city, and this opened for them all by itself. So they passed through and started walking down the street, and then the angel suddenly left him.

11 Peter finally came to his senses. “It’s really true!” he said. “The Lord has sent his angel and saved me from Herod and from what the Jewish leaders[f] had planned to do to me!” **12** When he realized this, he went to the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where many were gathered for prayer. **13** He knocked at the door in the gate, and a servant girl named Rhoda came to open it.

14 When she recognized Peter’s voice, she was so overjoyed that, instead of opening the door, she ran back inside and told everyone, “Peter is standing at the door!”

15 “You’re out of your mind!” they said. When she insisted, they decided, “It must be his angel.”

16 Meanwhile, Peter continued knocking. When they finally opened the door and saw him, they were amazed. **17** He motioned for them to quiet down and told them how the Lord had led him out of prison. “Tell James and the other brothers what happened,” he said. And then he went to another place.

18 At dawn there was a great commotion among the soldiers about what had happened to Peter. **19** Herod Agrippa ordered a thorough search for him. When he couldn’t be found, Herod interrogated the guards and sentenced them to death. Afterward Herod left Judea to stay in Caesarea for a while.

20 Now Herod was very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon. So they sent a delegation to make peace with him because their cities were dependent upon Herod’s country for food. The delegates won the support of Blastus, Herod’s personal assistant, **21** and an appointment with Herod was granted. When the day arrived, Herod put on his royal robes, sat on his throne, and made a speech to them. **22** The people gave him a great ovation, shouting, “It’s the voice of a god, not of a man!” **23** Instantly, an angel of the Lord struck Herod with a sickness, because he accepted the people’s worship instead of giving the glory to God. So he was consumed with worms and died.

24 Meanwhile, the word of God continued to spread, and there were many new believers. **25** When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission to Jerusalem, they returned,[g] taking John Mark with them.

Footnotes

11:20 Greek *the Hellenists* (i.e., those who speak Greek); other manuscripts read *the Greeks*.

11:26 Greek *disciples*; also in 11:29.

11:29 Greek *the brothers*.

12:1 Greek *Herod the king*. He was the nephew of Herod Antipas and a grandson of Herod the Great.

12:3 Greek *the days of unleavened bread*.

12:11 Or *the Jewish people*.

12:25 Or *mission, they returned to Jerusalem*. Other manuscripts read *mission, they returned from Jerusalem*; still others read *mission, they returned from Jerusalem to Antioch*.

Outline

1. Greet one another, begin with prayer, and read Acts 11:19–12:25.

2. Remind the class about the events of Acts 11:1-18.

3. Discuss the spread of the gospel to Antioch in Acts 11:19-30.

- The scene moves north (see map below): Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch
- Antioch third most important city in Roman Empire behind Rome and Alexandria
- First witness only to Jews, but then witness spreads to the Gentiles
- Barnabas sent to investigate; responds with joy and gives his blessing
- Barnabas gets Paul in Tarsus and together they serve in Antioch for an extended time
- Antioch: where Christians are first called Christians!
- Prophecy of famine prompts support by Gentiles to Jewish Christians in Jerusalem
- *Barnabas' encouragement strengthens and supports the Gentile Christians. What makes an encouraging word so helpful and refreshing? What are specific ways we can encourage fellow Christians as they follow Jesus?*
- *Why do you think the name "Christian" caught on? What does it represent? What other designations also aptly represent those who follow Jesus Christ as Lord? By which name would you prefer to be called and why?*
- *What is significant about the Gentile Christians purposing to support the Jewish Christians in the time of need to come? How may we mirror such compassion today?*

4. Discuss Peter's miraculous escape from prison in Acts 12:1-19 [15 minutes].

- Herod Agrippa begins period of persecution; James killed; Peter arrested
- Irony #1: Peter is first imprisoned then liberated around Passover, the time of celebrating Jewish liberation
- Peter released from prison through miraculous and unexpected intervention by God
- Irony #2: Peter doesn't believe he's been actually freed at first
- Peter goes to house where believers united in prayer for him
- Irony #3: believers can't believe their prayers have been answered
- *The gospel can justly be described as "liberation." Liberation from what? From what does the world today most need liberating? From what do you most need liberating?*
- *At times we go through the motions with prayer, not anticipating it will be answered. Why is this tendency more common than we'd like to admit? What can we do to combat it?*

5. Discuss the juxtaposition of Herod's death and the church's growth in Acts 12:20-25 (5 minutes).

- Herod's descent continues: acclamation by crowd of Herod as god-like not refuted
- Herod struck with illness and dies; possible cause: infestation of intestinal roundworms

— Contrast with continued growth of Christian witness by Barnabas and Paul
— *When and where have we seen people like Herod Agrippa before? Who are some modern-day equivalents? What leads them to believe and to act like they do?*

6. Close in prayer.

Map

from <https://www.simplybible.com/f99e-notes-the-two-antiochs.htm>

