

# THE ACTS

## OF THE APOSTLES

### Chapter 11:19 – 12:25

#### New horizons

\*What is so important about the name “Christian”?

\*How did God save Peter from execution?

\*What happened to one person who did not give God the glory?

#### **Review**

Answer these questions from previous chapters to refresh your memory about where we are as we begin this study.

- Why did disciples first spread outside of Jerusalem? (Acts 8:1)
- Who was Saul? Where did he go after he left Jerusalem? (Acts 9:26-30)
- Who was the first non-Jew (Gentile) to convert to Christ? (Acts 10:1-2, 44-48)
- What lesson did Peter learn from this incident? (Acts 10:34-35)
- Did the brethren in Jerusalem accept Peter's conclusion? (Acts 11:18)

#### **Acts 11:19-26                      The gospel spreads to new places and new people**

Verse 19 of Acts 11 takes us back in time from where we left off, to when the disciples were scattered by the persecution that began after Stephen was stoned (Acts 8:1). Some of these disciples ranged north. However, they had not yet understood that God was going to welcome Gentiles into His kingdom, so they only preached to Jews. Some time later, certain disciples did begin speak the gospel to some Greeks in the city of Antioch, which was a major Hellenistic city. Christ blessed this effort so that many believed, and a large number of them obeyed.

The brethren in Jerusalem, apparently after the events with Cornelius, heard about what was going on. They responded positively, and even supported the effort to reach the Gentiles by sending Barnabas. This is the third time we see Barnabas (see also 4:36-37; 9:26-27), and each time he shows himself to be an uplifting, encouraging individual. He rejoiced when he saw what wonders God was doing in these people's lives, and pushed them to stay loyal to Jesus. Barnabas thought of another individual who would be able to help these new converts: Saul, who had gone to Tarsus the last time we saw him. Barnabas went and brought him to Antioch, where they stayed for a year, teaching and helping to bring more people to Christ.

#### **Note: The name of Christian**

*The text records that, in Antioch, Jesus' disciples began to be called “Christians” for the first time. This was the typical way the Latin language would term a follower of any particular person or idea; therefore, someone “Christian” was a follower of Christ.*

*There are many people today who say they are “Christian;” but do their actions show that they are followers of Christ? Are they like the Christians scattered from Jerusalem — bold to talk about Jesus to all kinds of people? Do they act like Barnabas, encouraging and building people up, instead of tearing them down? Do they respond to calls for help, and serve like Paul?*

*Do they “remain true to the Lord”? There are many ways to be unfaithful to Christ. One way is to give our allegiance to a man, and not just to Jesus. If a Christian is a follower of Christ, then who, for example, does a Lutheran follow? The teachings of Martin Luther. Or a Calvinist? They follow John Calvin. Or a Methodist, a Catholic, or a Baptist? The ideas of the John Wesley, the Pope, or Baptist creeds ... the list goes on. Notice that that these disciples in Antioch were not called Barnabians or Saulians — only Christians. Our name shows who we are. Let us only bear the name Christian, and only follow Christ and His word.*

### **Acts 11:27-30                      A great famine**

While Barnabas and Saul were in Antioch, some prophets from Jerusalem visited them. One, named Agabus, foretold a great famine, where there would be a food shortage “all over the world” (which meant, in those days, the Roman empire). The brethren in Antioch knew that the Christians in Judea would have a difficult time during the famine, so they decided to send a contribution in order to help them. Once again we see the unity of the brotherhood, even as the kingdom is spreading across ethnic lines; just as the Jewish Christians supported the Greek Christians (recall verse 22), now the Greeks in Antioch are helping the Jews in Judea. Barnabas and Saul delivered the gift.

### **Acts 12:1-19                      Peter delivered from Herod's hand**

About the same time, Herod the king began to mistreat some of the Christians in Jerusalem. This was not the same Herod that tried to kill Jesus at His birth (Matthew 2:1-18), or the same Herod that killed John the Baptist (Mark 6:14-29), but they were all part of the same family. This Herod executed James the brother of John, the apostle. By now, popular opinion had shifted to anti-Christian, so people were pleased at the execution. Herod thought he could make people even more happy, so he arrested Peter as well, and was going to publicly kill him, too, after the Passover was over. Obviously, the brethren were very distraught over what was happening, so they prayed to God and asked for His help.

God answered their prayers. The night before Peter was supposed to be brought forth publicly, an angel came to rescue him. Peter had been sleeping — which at first seems odd, considering that this was to be his last night in this world. But Peter's ease of mind probably shows his faith; he knew that God would either rescue him, or that he would pass from this life to be with Christ. The angel woke him up and led him out of the prison without any of the 16 guards ever noticing. Peter thought this whole procedure was too good to be true; he thought he was seeing a vision. It was only when that they reached the street that he realized that the Lord had just delivered him from Herod.

When he figured this out, Peter hurried over to a house where many of the brethren were gather to pray. The servant girl who came to the door was so excited that it was Peter, that she forgot to open the door for him before she went to tell the others the news! But the others, like Peter, at first didn't believe it was real and thought the girl was crazy. They thought that maybe Peter had been killed already and had returned as an angel. Imagine their amazement when they finally did open the door! Peter explained his experiences and told them to let everyone else know, including James (a different James than the one who was executed earlier).

Of course, by the next day, the soldiers that were supposed to be guarding Peter were completely amazed that he was not in his cell. They certainly would have seen him if he had tried to escape! But they apparently never solved the mystery, because when Herod found out that Peter was no longer in his custody, he had all 16 of them executed.

### **Acts 12:20-23                      The death of Herod**

This account tells us how the ruthless king Herod eventually received what he gave out. This story actually happened three years after the events surrounding Peter's imprisonment. But Luke, the writer of Acts, includes it here to show us divine retribution: God was going to repay Herod according to his deeds. One day, Herod was giving a speech before the people of another region, who had come to him begging for peace. The people were so impressed with his royal appearance that they shouted that he was a god, and not a man. But instead of rejecting this title, Herod accepted it. Immediately God struck him so that shortly later, worms ate his body from the inside and he died. This was yet another victory over an enemy of the church.

### **Acts 12:24-25                      Conclusion**

So, because God was with His people, the gospel continued to spread and thrive.

Verse 25 tells us that Barnabas, Saul, and a young man named John Mark returned to Antioch after delivering the gift to the brethren (recall 11:27-30). These verses are a preview into the next chapter, where these same men will be ranging far out into the world in order to spread the news about Christ.

**Choose the right answer:**

- \_\_\_ 1. Who did the Jerusalem church send to encourage the new converts in Antioch?  
a) Peter, b) Saul, c) Cornelius, or d) Barnabas.
- \_\_\_ 2. What did people start calling the disciples in Antioch? a) Saulines, b) Jehovah's Witnesses, c) Pentecostals, or d) Christians.
- \_\_\_ 3. What did the prophet Agabus predict there would be? a) a plague, b) a famine, c) a war, or d) the end of the world.
- \_\_\_ 4. When Peter was arrested, what did the other brethren do? a) they prayed, b) they rioted, c) they sent a letter to the governor, or d) they surrendered themselves as well.
- \_\_\_ 5. Why did Herod die? a) because he was getting old, b) because he hanged himself out of guilt for killing James, c) because he believed in Christ, or d) because he did not give God the glory.
- \_\_\_ 6. When Barnabas and Saul returned to Antioch, who did they bring with them? a) Rhoda, b) Mary, c) John Mark, or d) James.

**True or false:**

- \_\_\_ 1. The Christians who were scattered from Jerusalem only spoke to Jews at first about the gospel.
- \_\_\_ 2. The church in Jerusalem did not support the preaching of the gospel to the Greeks.
- \_\_\_ 3. The church in Antioch did not support the church in Jerusalem.
- \_\_\_ 4. The people liked it that Herod killed James the brother of John.
- \_\_\_ 5. Peter didn't think the angel leading him out of the jail was real at first.
- \_\_\_ 6. The brethren who had gathered to pray at first didn't believe the news that Peter had been freed from the jail.
- \_\_\_ 7. Herod, when he saw that Peter had been miraculously freed, converted and became a Christian.

*After you've filled out the answers, send this lesson back to the person who sent it to you with your name and address. They will correct your answers and discuss any questions or comments you have on the text.*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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*Or, send it to:*

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