

## THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Acts 11:29-12:10 | Session 31 | Peter and the Angel

Peter has been preaching the Lord Jesus as Messiah to the Gentiles and many of them are turning to the Lord (11:21); so many that the church in Antioch sends Barnabas to Tarsus to look for Saul who, evidently, being chosen by God to minister to the Jews and the Gentiles (9:15) can assist these new converts in the Jewish faith *and* belief in Jesus as Messiah. Saul and Barnabas spent an entire year in Antioch with these new *disciples* who, for the first time, were *called Christians*. Still, there has been no salvation by *grace through faith* being taught yet. Prophets are still on the scene at this point in the book of Acts and one of them warns of a famine which apparently hits the Jewish assembly in Jerusalem rather hard.

Chapter 11:29,30—

**The disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief...by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.** Due to a *worldwide* famine (11:28) relief, in the form of money, was collected by the Antioch assembly. This money would be delivered to the assembly in Jerusalem by Barnabas and Saul. If the famine was *worldwide* how could the assembly have enough money to send to Judea? The answer may be found in Acts 2:45. The assembly in Jerusalem, at least 10 years earlier, had sold all of their possessions. In other words, their *socialism* was now taking its toll (as socialism always does), and it failed. The assembly in Antioch had not gone the communal route and instead had wealthy members who were benevolent toward the Jerusalem assembly.

**The elders** shouldn't be confused with those in the evangelical church who are called *elders*. The Greek word used here is *presbuteros* which also translates as "old man" and "eldest." These were the *older men* in leadership in the Jerusalem assembly. Our 21<sup>st</sup> century church culture has often changed the meaning of the word **elder** to mean *pastor*.

Chapter 12:1-2—

This chapter takes place in A.D. 44 and we can be sure of the date due to the death of Herod in verse 23. The author, Luke, brought Saul back in to the narrative in chapter 11, but now shifts back to the Apostle Peter. First, however, he gives a brief report of the death (most likely by decapitation) of James the apostle, the brother of John the apostle. After this point, whenever we see James in the Scripture, it will always be James, the half-brother of Jesus. This Herod (Agrippa I) was the grandson of *Herod the Great*. The historian Josephus describes Herod Agrippa as a people pleaser. If so, why did he **stretch forth his hands to vex** (aggravate) **certain of the church**? Verse 3 gives the answer.

Verse 3—

**Because he saw it pleased the Jews.** These were obviously not the Jews in the *Christian* assembly, but those leaders who were in favor of persecuting anyone who appeared to go against orthodox Judaism. *Judean* is a term for Jews living in Judea (from the tribe of Judah). Herod gained so many accolades for killing James (in order to keep his popularity going) he **proceeded further to take Peter also**. Luke adds the parenthetical statement **(Then were the days of unleavened bread)**, That is, the Passover, a seven-day festival that would have drawn thousand to Jerusalem.

Verse 4—

**Apprehended him, he put him in prison.** He is under heavy guard, **four quaternions of soldiers** (a unit of four soldiers). We might recall when Jesus was alive the Jews plotted to kill Jesus, but *they feared the people* (Luke 22:2). Now, Agrippa acts to **please the people**. It appears Herod's plan was to keep Peter in prison until after **Easter** (that is, Passover. In 1611 when the KJV was translated, Easter and Passover were synonymous) and then kill him.

Verse 5—

As he sat in prison, the **assembly prayed without ceasing...unto God for him**. Since this is an historical event, we can't use this verse to make a doctrine on prayer. Yet, we might take the Apostle Paul's admonition to the Thessalonians (5:17) to **pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks**.

Verse 6—

Peter sat in prison, **bound with two chains**, while a guard was on each side of him and two others guarded the door. Luke wants us to know, it would be impossible for a prison break. But God had other means to get Peter out.

Verse 7—

**Behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him.** It might be a testament to Peter's faith that the night before he is schedule to die, he is sound asleep. His sleep is so deep the angel **smote Peter on the side...saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell...** The word **smote** may come from the word *to sting*. **The chains fell off** indicates it is truly a miracle.

Verse 8—

*Get up, get dressed, and get going!*

Verse 9, 10—

Peter, no stranger to a vision, **thought he saw a vision**. Verse 10 describes in more detail what Peter believed was a vision. Was it a vision? Or, was it a miracle? We will have to find out next time.