

# ACTS 11 and ACTS 12

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Remember, last week, how Peter was graced with a major attitude adjustment that led to the salvation of a gentile and his family and friends? And that he fellowshiped with them, stayed with them and ate with them? That single event was the start of gentile church and the beginnings of the fulfillment of the commission given to the Apostles. It had to be the leadership that did this for it was a top-down commandment;

Well, that news came to Jerusalem and predictably, Peter ran into some resistance when he returned to the church there.

(Acts 11:1 NKJV) Now the apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. (2) **And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him, (3) saying, "You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!"**

Oy Vey!

(Acts 11:4 NKJV) But Peter explained *it* to them in order from the beginning, saying:

(Acts 11:5 NKJV) "I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, an object descending like a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came to me. (6) When I observed it intently and considered, I saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. (7) And I heard a voice saying to me, '**Rise, Peter; kill and eat.**' (8) But I said, 'Not so, Lord! For nothing common or unclean has at any time entered my mouth.' (9) But the voice answered me again from heaven, '**What God has cleansed you must not call common.**' (10) Now this was done three times, and all were drawn up again into heaven. (11) At that very moment, three men stood before the house where I was, having been sent to me from Caesarea. (12) Then the Spirit told me to go with them, doubting nothing. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered the man's house. (13) And he told us how he had seen an angel standing in his house, who said to him, 'Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter, (14) who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved.'

(Acts 11:15 NKJV) And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning. (16) Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, '**John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.**'

(Acts 11:17 NKJV) If therefore God gave them the same gift as *He gave* us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, **who was I that I could withstand God?"**

This is reminiscent of:

Acts 5:34-39 NKJV Then one in the council stood up, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in respect by all the people, and commanded them to put the apostles outside for a little while. (35) And he said to them: "Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men.

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(38) And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; (39) but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it—lest you even be found to fight against God."

**(Acts 11:18 NKJV) When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, "Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life."**

Stunned at first, they came to understand and therefore glorified God!

And with that one truth, 2000 years of salvation came to folks like you!

With that one truth, a huge door was opened, thru which Jesus promised Saul would walk.

**(Acts 11:19 NKJV) Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only.**

These men and women were unaware of Peter's experience with the gentiles. They were doing what they believed was their calling...Jews preaching to Jews because Jews didn't have any dealings with gentiles; I am not implying that this was wrong just out of focus on what Jesus had in mind;

This next verse I need to read in 3 different ways:

**(Acts 11:20 NKJV) But** some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the **Hellenists**, preaching the Lord Jesus.

*And some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the **Greeks**, preaching the Lord Jesus.*

*Some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the **Hellenists**, preaching the Lord Jesus.*

The word "but" would indicate a contrast. So, in this case, the word "Hellenist", which ordinarily means "A Greek Jew", some translations use the word "Gentiles" or "Grecians" as opposed to Jews.

So, the issue is, is Luke saying that these men were witnessing to Jews or Greeks/Gentiles? (note: knowing that they were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, doesn't help: Barnabas was from Cyprus and the man who carried Jesus's cross was from Cyrene (Gill)).

Many, unlike Gill, believe that they were gentiles and the context of the whole chapter seems to lend some credence to this interpretation.

**(Acts 11:21 NKJV) And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.**

This was a common occurrence; but why? I think there are two basic reasons: 1) this was always the work of the Holy Spirit; we can always get people to join a fellowship, a club, a

movement; But only the Holy Spirit can convert a heart of stone into a heart of flesh, and 2) they preached the LORD Jesus Christ; what made the message so appealing? Let's read it again: "they preached the LORD Jesus Christ". It was the Person of Christ. It was the God of Christ and the Christ of God; It was the Truth of Christ and the Christ of Truth; It was the Grace of Christ and the Christ of Grace;

**(Acts 11:22 NKJV)** Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, **and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch.** (23) When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord. (24) **For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord.**

Those in Jerusalem, when they heard about these things, sent Barnabas. He was evidently a mature, faithful believer who with the gift of encouragement help establish the church there.

What Barnabas witnessed was the Grace of God in action! He exhorted them all to **open their hearts** and with **determination, hold on tight to the LORD** (as the Greek words here convey).

**(Acts 11:25 NKJV)** Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul.

Why he went is left up to conjecture; Perhaps Barnabas thought that Saul would make a great addition to the "ministry team" in Antioch, I suspect that as with any growth, there's a need for good, solid teachers;

"seek" in the Greek carries with it the idea of searching out with intensity;

Historians write that Saul had been there for 12 years!

**(Acts 11:26 NKJV)** And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.

The term "Christian" was "coined" by those in Antioch. It means "Christ's People". It was often used by the local's in a derogatory way "Oh there go those people of Jesus, another false prophet!!"

However, it caught on with the believers and they started using it to describe themselves!

Albert Barnes:

It is, however, an honored name - the most honorable appellation that can be conferred on a mortal. It suggests at once to a Christian the name of his great Redeemer; the idea of our intimate relation to him; and the thought that we receive him as our chosen Leader, the source of our blessings, the author of our salvation, the fountain of our joys. It is the distinguishing name of all the redeemed. It is not that we belong to this or that denomination; it is not that our names are connected with high and illustrious ancestors; it is not that they are recorded in the books of heraldry; it is not that they stand high in courts, and among the frivolous, the fashionable, and the rich, that true honor is conferred upon men. These are not the things that give distinction and specialty to the followers of the Redeemer. It is that they are "Christians."

This is their special name; by this they are known; this at once suggests their character, their feelings, their doctrines, their hopes, their joys.

Guzik describes an account of an early church historian Eusebius, who writes of a believer named Sanctus from France, who was tortured for Jesus. As they tortured him cruelly, they hoped to get him to say something evil or blasphemous. They asked his name, and he would only reply, "I am a Christian." "What nation do you belong to?" He would answer, "I am a Christian." "What city do you live in?" "I am a Christian." His questioners began to get angry: "Are you a slave or a free man?" "I am a Christian" was the only reply. No matter what they asked about him, he would only answer, "I am a Christian." This made his torturers all the more determined to break him, but they could not, and he died with the words "I am a Christian" on his lips. (Eusebius, *Church History*)

(Acts 11:27 NKJV) And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. (28) Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar. (29) Then the disciples, each according to his ability, **determined** to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. (30) This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

The famine was known throughout the Roman Empire. It appears that perhaps Luke recorded this account because he intended to show the appreciation of the believers in Antioch for Barnabas and Saul staying with the church to teach and encourage them in their walks with Christ and to show their unity with the church in Jerusalem.

Now, along with the spread of Good News of Christ Jesus came continued persecution; Satan was not a happy camper!

(Acts 12:1 NKJV) Now about that time Herod the king stretched out *his* hand to harass some from the church.

This is Herod Agrippa I, the grandson of Herod the Great, who ruled in the days of Jesus' birth ([Mat 2:1-16](#)). Herod Agrippa I was also the nephew of Herod Antipas, who had a role in the trial of Jesus ([Luk 23:7-12](#)).

Why he did this was perhaps politically motivated, to impress the Jews in Jerusalem and to increase his popularity with those religious leaders who might help him to maintain his power base.

(Acts 12:2 NKJV) Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword.

Herod had him beheaded. James was the first apostle to be martyred. And the only one to be recorded in Scripture. Tradition has recorded the following:

1. The most commonly accepted church tradition in regard to the death of an apostle is that the apostle Peter was crucified upside-down in Rome in fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy ([John 21:18](#)).
2. Matthew suffered martyrdom in Ethiopia, killed by a sword wound.
3. James, the brother of Jesus (not officially an apostle), was the leader of the church in Jerusalem. He was thrown from the southeast pinnacle of the temple (over a hundred feet down) when he refused to deny his faith in Christ. When they discovered that he survived the fall, his enemies beat James to death with a club. This is thought to be the same pinnacle where Satan had taken Jesus during the temptation. [Bartholomew](#), also known as Nathanael, was a missionary to Asia. He witnessed in present-day Turkey and was martyred for his preaching in Armenia, being flayed to death by a whip.
4. Andrew was crucified on an x-shaped cross in Greece. After being whipped severely by seven soldiers, they tied his body to the cross with cords to prolong his agony. His followers reported that when he was led toward the cross, Andrew saluted it in these words: "I have long desired and expected this happy hour. The cross has been consecrated by the body of Christ hanging on it." He continued to preach to his tormentors for two days until he died.
5. The [apostle Thomas was stabbed with a spear in India](#) during one of his missionary trips to establish the church there. Matthias, the apostle chosen to replace the traitor Judas Iscariot, was stoned and then beheaded.
6. The [apostle Paul](#) was tortured and then beheaded by the evil Emperor Nero in Rome in A.D. 67. There are traditions regarding the other apostles as well, but none with any reliable historical or traditional support.
7. John faced martyrdom when he was boiled in a huge basin of boiling oil during a wave of persecution in Rome. However, he was miraculously delivered from death. John was then sentenced to the mines on the prison island of Patmos. He wrote his prophetic book of Revelation on Patmos. The apostle John was later freed and returned to what is

now modern-day Turkey. He died as an old man, the only apostle to die peacefully.

The death of James was foretold by Jesus:

Mark 10:33-34 NKJV "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him to the Gentiles; (34) and they will mock Him, and scourge Him, and spit on Him, and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again."

Mark 10:35-40 NKJV Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Him, saying, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask." (36) And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?" (37) They said to Him, "Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory." (38) But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" (39) They said to Him, "We are able." So Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink the cup that I drink, and with the baptism I am baptized with you will be baptized; (40) but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but *it is for those for whom it is prepared.*"

This martyrdom was the fulfillment of that promise for James; he indeed drank from that cup!

(Acts 12:3 NKJV) And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. Now it was *during* the Days of Unleavened Bread. (4) So when he had arrested him, he put *him* in prison, and delivered *him* to four squads of soldiers to keep him, intending to bring him before the people after Passover.

Herod was happy about the results: he was gaining in popularity with the Jews. Like his uncle before him, he had plans for Peter!

Matthew 27:15-16 NKJV Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to releasing to the multitude one prisoner whom they wished. (16) And at that time they had a notorious prisoner called Barabbas.

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Matthew 27:20-23 NKJV But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitudes that they should ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus. (21) The governor answered and said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" They said, "Barabbas!" (22) Pilate said to them, "What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" *They* all said to him, "Let Him be crucified!" (23) Then the governor said, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they cried out all the more, saying, "Let Him be crucified!"

Tensions mount....

(Acts 12:5 NKJV) Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church.

The church was praying constantly...but more than that, for the word also implies fervency. So they were praying in Ernest; Who's Ernest? I don't know, but I hear he has a sister Constance!

(Acts 12:6 NKJV) And when Herod was about to bring him out, that night Peter was sleeping, bound with two chains between two soldiers; and the guards before the door were keeping the prison.

Herod must have thought that Peter is public enemy #1; He was sleeping between 2 soldiers chained to each one of them; and, there were guards at the door!

But don't skip over the most important word: SLEEPING! Peter knew what Herod had done to James! Peter wasn't worried! For Peter, knowing who He Knew, this was an Even-If moment; It simply didn't matter to him if he were to die; It just would be that much sooner to see his Friend;

(Acts 12:7 NKJV) Now behold, an angel of the Lord stood by *him*, and a light shone in the prison; and he struck Peter on the side and raised him up, saying, "Arise quickly!" And his chains fell off *his* hands.

So, this angel of the LORD pops in and pokes him in the side "Hey! Wake up!". As he helps Peter to his feet, the shackles fall off his hands. The guards have been put under some sort of angelic stupor since they are totally unaware of what's going on!

(Acts 12:8 NKJV) Then the angel said to him, "Gird yourself and tie on your sandals"; and so he did. And he said to him, "Put on your garment and follow me."

Get up! Get Dressed! Put your sandals on! Come on! Let's get going!

(Acts 12:9 NKJV) So he went out and followed him, and did not know that what was done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision.

In perfect Peter fashion: Am I dreaming???

(Acts 12:10 NKJV) When they were past the first and the second guard posts, they came to the iron gate that leads to the city, which opened to them of its own accord; and they went out and went down one street, and immediately the angel departed from him.

So, not only did the guards in the cell remain clueless, so were the others at their posts; And then, in perfect Angelic fashion, the locked, iron gate opens on its own! And away they went! They went on a little way and the angel left him, his job being completed!

(Acts 12:11 NKJV) And when Peter had come to himself, he said, "Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent His angel, and has delivered me from the hand of Herod and *from* all the expectation of the Jewish people."

Again, in true Peter fashion, he comes to himself and realizes it was not a vision and that Jesus had sent an angel to free from jail and from the evil Herod and from the Jewish people who would have loved to see him dead!

(Acts 12:12 NKJV) So, when he had considered *this*, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying.

He goes to the house of Mary. She may have hosted a home group there for Peter went there first believing others would be there as well!

BTW: She's the mother of John Mark. And evidently the sister of Barnabas... This is the same John Mark that wrote the gospel of Mark and came to the Lord via Peter.

(Acts 12:13 NKJV) And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a girl named Rhoda (Morgenstern) came to answer. (14) When she recognized Peter's voice, because of *her* gladness she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter stood before the gate.

She's so ecstatic to hear his voice, she runs to get the others, forgetting to let him in!

(Acts 12:15 NKJV) But they said to her, "You are beside yourself!" Yet she kept insisting that it was so. So they said, "It is his angel."

In a very polite and gentle way they said to her "What! You such a meshuggeneh"... but she kept on insisting, so they tell her, "enough already, it's just his angel". What? His guardian angel? Forgetting for a moment that we know about the angel who got him out of prison (which might make this a good moment of irony)...

This was not as strange of a notion as one might think: John Gill explains:

They figured that it was an angel in Peter's shape, who had something to communicate: and this agrees with the notions of the Jews, who think that angels do assume the shapes of men on certain occasions: so they say (i), when Moses was in danger in Pharaoh's court, God sent Michael, the prince of the host of heaven, "in the shape of an executioner"; who brought him at once out of Egypt, and set him at the border of it, the distance of three days journey: Bar Kaphra says (k), an angel descended, "in the likeness of Moses", and caused him to flee, and they thought the angel had been Moses:

**Something else to consider:** they were together, fervently praying for Peter's deliverance and when he shows up at the door, they don't believe it! What did they pray? Was it with weak faith that said "Oh LORD, please help Peter through this trial and have him be faithful in his suffering, even to the end"?

(Acts 12:16 NKJV) Now Peter continued knocking; and when they opened *the door* and saw him, they were astonished.

Ah, oh, um, .... Oops...Sorry...

(Acts 12:17 NKJV) But motioning to them with his hand to keep silent, he declared to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, "Go, tell these things to James and to the brethren." And he departed and went to another place.

Peter tells them to keep quiet so as not to wake up the neighbors...then he tells them what happened and then instructs them to let James and the other apostles know. Then, Peter left...and this is the last mention of Peter by Luke...except for a brief time in Chapter 15, his 2 letters and a shout-out by Paul in Galatians...

(Acts 12:18 NKJV) Then, as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers about what had become of Peter. (19) But when Herod had searched for him and not found him, he examined the guards and commanded that *they* should be put to death. And he went down from Judea to Caesarea, and stayed *there*.

This next small section is weird to me:

(Acts 12:20 NKJV) Now Herod had been very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; but they came to him with one accord, and having made Blastus the king's personal aide their friend, they asked for peace, because their country was supplied with food by the king's *country*.

(Acts 12:21 NKJV) So on a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat on his throne and gave an oration to them.

(Acts 12:22 NKJV) And the people kept shouting, "**The voice of a god and not of a man!**"

(Acts 12:23 NKJV) Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died.

“eaten from the inside out...”. This man, who thought himself god, who tried to steal the Glory due to the Living God, who’s internal state was rottenness, was killed from the inside out. It was recorded by some historians that it took 5 days for the worms (or disease) to do their work!

(Acts 12:24 NKJV) But the word of God grew and multiplied.

(Acts 12:25 NKJV) And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled *their* ministry, and they also took with them John whose surname was Mark.

While we can't understand why God chose to take James and safeguard Peter, that shouldn't be our concern. What we should understand is that NOTHING can thwart the purposes of God! Nothing can nor will destroy the church, that is, the Body of Christ! Satan has been trying for many, many years and will continue to until God takes us home (like James) or God has us stay to fulfill our calling (like Peter and Paul) or the Father tells the Son: “Go bring Your Bride home!”.

And for that we all say “AMEN”!