"Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord" Acts 11:19-21

The Church and Its Mission



Preparing to Reach the Greek-Speaking World

Acts 11-12

Lesson 10 of the series "The Beginning of an Unfinished Work"

“**The apostles and the believers <u>throughout Judea</u> heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God**. So, when **Peter went up to Jerusalem**, **<u>the circumcised believers criticized him</u>** and said, “You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.”(Acts 11:1-3)

- ✓ After recognizing the conversion of Cornelius and his family as well as spending some time discipling them, Peter will return to Jerusalem where he meets with some opposition from the Jewish Christians there.
- ✓ The “circumcised” believers (those who still held to the Law of Moses) seemed to take issue over the fact that Peter ate with Gentiles
- ✓ There may have been others who didn’t object as strongly as the “circumcised believers” but still questioned the idea of Gentiles converting to the faith.
- ✓ The idea of the church fellowshipping with “non-circumcised” believers was a delicate matter for the early church and this won’t be the first time they openly address the topic.

“**Starting from the beginning, Peter told them the whole story**: “I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance, I saw a vision. I saw something like a large sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to where I was. I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, reptiles and birds. Then I heard a voice telling me, ‘Get up, Peter. Kill and eat. The voice spoke from heaven a second time, ‘**Do not call anything impure that God has made clean**.’ This happened three times, and then it was all pulled up to heaven again. ”(Acts 11:4-10)

- ✓ Peter explains his vision to the believers at Jerusalem and defends why he entered the home of a Gentile (Cornelius) and shared a meal with uncircumcised people.
- ✓ Peter had come to an understanding that the vision of the “unclean animals” was a representation (metaphorically speaking) of the Gentiles whom the Jews considered unclean or separate from God’s covenant people
- ✓ The Lord impressed upon Peter in the vision that neither he nor ultimately the church was to look at the uncircumcised Gentiles as unclean any longer

"Right then three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea stopped at the house where I was staying. The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them. **These six brothers also went with me, and we entered the man's house**. He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, 'Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. **He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved**."(Acts 11:11-14)

- ✓ There were plenty of witnesses that corroborate Peter's claim. This also brought validity to what transpired at the house of Cornelius
- ✓ The conversion of Cornelius and his entire household emphasizes that God's grace applies to all people. The gospel message (The Good News that Jesus saves) and the gift (indwelling) of the Holy Spirit were now being offered to the Gentile (non-Jewish) world. This was proof that people did not need to convert to Judaism, keep the Mosaic Law, or be circumcised **to be saved**. Though there is nothing wrong with following the Mosaic Law – it is just not required to be saved. It is faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior that saves us.

Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." "**Woman," Jesus replied, "believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem**. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. **Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks**. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth." The woman said, "**I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." Then Jesus declared, "I, the one speaking to you—I am he**." (John 4:19-26)

"**But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us**. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies, **we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son**, much more, having been reconciled, **we shall be saved by His life**. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation." (Romans 5:8-11)

"**For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves**; **it is the gift of God**, **not of works**, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." (Ephesians 2:8-10)

"**As I began to speak**, **the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning**. Then I remembered what the Lord had said: 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' **So, if God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God's way**?" When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, "So then, even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life."

(Acts 11:15-18)

- ✓ Peter connects what transpired with Cornelius and his family to the events of Pentecost (Acts 2) where the Spirit came upon them and manifested Himself through signs and wonders. This validated the conversion of Cornelius and his family and quieted down the opposition.
- ✓ The events surrounding the vision received by Peter, and the conversion of Cornelius and his family helped to lay the groundwork for the spread of the Gospel to the "uttermost parts of the earth".

"As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. Then I remembered what the Lord had said: 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' So, if God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God's way?" **When they heard this**, **they had no further objections and praised God**, saying, "**So then, even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life**."
(Acts 11:15-18)

- ✓ Peter helped in bringing the other Apostles at Jerusalem to a point of acceptance of Gentiles as their brothers and sisters in the faith.

- ✓ The Gospel was now penetrating into regions beyond the influence of "Jewish Law" which would require monumental efforts on behalf of the Apostles in regard to training and discipleship.

- ✓ Peter's ability to convince the leaders at Jerusalem that this was of God was only the beginning of the challenges that faced the Apostles.

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(Acts 11:15-18)

- ✓ The efforts of Peter's leadership helped to bring acceptance of these believers into the fellowship and avoided a potential division in the Church
- ✓ The church was growing rapidly, and the Lord raised up others to fill the gap (i.e. Paul and Barnabas) and provide additional leadership. This growth will add some new challenges that the Apostles will face given some of the cultural ungodly and wicked behavior of the Gentiles that only sound Biblical teaching could correct.
- ✓ Luke will now take the narrative of his story back to the events just after the martyrdom of Stephen and show the explosive growth of the Gentile church.

"**Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed** traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord." (Acts 11:19-21)

- ✓ Luke refers to the events surrounding the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 7-8) and how that caused many of the believers in the church to scatter to other regions.

- ✓ If you recall, Saul (a persecutor of the followers of The Way – Jesus) was directly responsible for the fear that spread among the believers in Jerusalem at that time:

And **Saul approved of their killing him**. On that day a **great persecution broke out against the church** in Jerusalem, and **all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria**. Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. **But Saul began to destroy the church**. Going from house to house, **he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison**." (Acts 8:1-3)

"**Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed** traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord." (Acts 11:19-21)

- ✓ **The death of Stephen had an enormous impact on the world of his time -** It caused Jewish believers to flee to the regions of Samaria where the Gospel would be preached, and many Samaritans came to faith in Christ. (Acts 8:4-8)

*"**Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.** Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there. When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said. For with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. So, there was great joy in that city." (Acts 8:4-8)*

"**Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed** traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord." (Acts 11:19-21)

- ✓ **<u>The death of Stephen had an enormous impact on the world of his time</u> –** It influenced Saul who became known as Paul, in a way that eventually brought him to faith in Christ. (Acts 9)

"But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! **This man is my chosen instrument to <u>proclaim my name to the Gentiles</u> and their kings and to the people of Israel**. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me **so that you may see again and <u>be filled with the Holy Spirit</u>**." (Acts 9:15-17)

"**Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed** traveled as far as **Phoenicia**, **Cyprus** and **Antioch**, **spreading the word only among Jews**. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord." (Acts 11:19-21)

- ✓ **The death of Stephen had an enormous impact on the world of his time** - It also caused the Gospel to spread to the Gentile lands although at first they primarily focused on reaching the Jews who had scattered there. This was the beginning of what Jesus commanded them to do and what became the "Beginning of an Unfinished Work".

"Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. **Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and **you will be my witnesses** in **Jerusalem**, and in **all Judea** and **Samaria**, and **to the ends of the earth**." (Acts 1:8)

"Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. **Some of them, however**, **men from <u>Cyprus</u>** and **<u>Cyrene</u>**, **went to <u>Antioch</u>** and began to speak to Greeks also, **<u>telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus</u>**. The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord." (Acts 11:19-21)

- ✓ Luke introduces us to a group of **<u>unnamed believers</u>** who begin to preach to the Greeks there in Antioch. Although Luke doesn't tell us who these believers are, he does tell us where they came from:

  - ➢ **<u>Cyprus</u>** was an island off the coast not far from Antioch
  - ➢ **<u>Cyrene</u>** was a city located in North Africa near modern day Libya



- ✓ Perhaps these unnamed preachers from Cyprus and Cyrene came to faith in Christ because of others who took the Gospel message to those regions (Acts 8:14-17, 26-40)

"Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. **Some of them, however**, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, **went to <u>Antioch</u>** and **began to speak to <u>Greeks</u>** also, **<u>telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus</u>**. The Lord's hand was with them, and **<u>a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord</u>**." (Acts 11:19-21)

- ✓ Antioch will become one of the central focal points of the church from here on
  - ➢ Antioch was the third largest city in the Roman Empire. (Rome was the largest and Alexandria was the second largest). Antioch was a commercial center and home to a rather large Jewish community
  - ➢ This will be the beginning point for all of Paul's missionary journey. It will be here that the word "**<u>Christian</u>**" will be used to identify those who are followers of "**<u>The Way</u>**" (Jesus Christ).
  - ➢ The church continues to grow as many come to know the Lord there in Antioch

"**News of this reached the church in Jerusalem**, and **they sent Barnabas to Antioch**. When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. **He was a good man**, **full of the Holy Spirit and faith**, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord. (Acts 11:22-24)

- ✓ With the news that Gentiles were coming to faith in Christ; the church at Jerusalem took notice and will send Barnabas to investigate
- ✓ Here are a few things that we know about Barnabas
  - ➢ He was a Jew from the island of Cyprus (Acts 4:36, 11:20)
  - ➢ He was a giving man (Acts 4:37)
  - ➢ He seemed to be a kind and gentle man indicated by his nickname which meant "**son of encouragement**."
  - ➢ He witnessed the grace of God at work in the lives of these Gentiles in Antioch. He rejoiced with them, encouraged them in their faith, and taught them the Word of God

"**Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul**, and when he found him, **he brought him to Antioch**. So, for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. **The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch**."
(Acts 11:25-26)

- ✓ The church began to grow in Antioch of Syria which resulted in Barnabas recruiting Saul of Tarsus (aka Paul) to help him teach this culturally diverse congregation of believers.
- ✓ This was a perfect pairing of Saul's background in the Old Testament Scriptures with the leadership and encouraging skills of Barnabas
- ✓ Both men remained in Antioch for a whole year where they taught large numbers of people which served as a model for the structure and organization of the early church. This was a steady and an intentional foundational grounding of what it meant to be faithful followers of Jesus
- ✓ It was here in Antioch, where followers of Christ were known as "Christians"

"**<u>During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch</u>**. One of them, named **<u>Agabus</u>**, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) **The disciples, as each one was able, decided to provide help for the brothers and sisters living in Judea**. This they did, **sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul**." (Acts 11:27-30)

- ✓ Luke records that a group of believers (having the gift of prophesy) came from Jerusalem to Antioch.
- ✓ A man named Agabus (he is also mentioned again in Acts 21:10-11) will tell/prophesy of a famine that will spread across the world (probably the "known Roman world"). History does record several series of famines in the Roman Empire during the reign of Claudius (AD 41-54).
- ✓ The believers in Antioch will share their own possessions (money, food, clothing) to help aid and assist those in Jerusalem who were impacted by the famine. This was what Jesus taught and will help create a bond of friendship and love

The Church Begins to face Persecution

Acts 12



“**It was about this time that <u>King Herod</u> arrested some who belonged to the church, <u>intending to persecute them</u>**. He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. When he saw that this met with approval among the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Festival of Unleavened Bread. After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover.” (Acts 12:1-4)

- ✓ Who was this person that Luke refers to as King Herod
  - ➢ His actual name was Herod Agrippa I and he was partly Jewish (from the Hasmonean dynasty on his grandmother's side) and his grandfather was Herod the Great (an Idumean/Edomite) which is why he is referred to as “King Herod”
  - ➢ He ruled over most of the same region as his grandfather (Herod the Great)
  - ➢ He loved to be loved by the Jews and did what he could to please them – thus arresting and killing Christians brought him plenty of Jewish support.

Some Noteworthy comments

- ✓ As the church continued to grow there were many who stood in opposition:

"The **priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees** came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. They seized Peter and John and, because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand." (Acts 4:1-4)

"Then **the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees**, were filled with jealousy. They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. "Go, stand in the temple courts," he said, "and tell the people all about this new life." (Acts 5:17-20)

"When the **members of the Sanhedrin** heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of **a young man named Saul**. (Acts 7:54-58)

"On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. But **Saul began to destroy the church**. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison." (Acts 8:1-3)

Some Noteworthy comments

- ✓ Some, like Saul of Tarsus will repent and turn to God while others (Jews and Romans) will put up a united front to do everything they could to destroy it.

"Meanwhile, **Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples**. He went to the **high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus**, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." (Acts 9:1-6)

"Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength. Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? **And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests**?" **Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah**. " (Acts 9:17-22)

"And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock, **I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it**" (Matthew 16:18)

"It was about this time that **King Herod** arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. He **had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword**. When **he saw that this met with approval among the Jews**, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Festival of Unleavened Bread. After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover."
(Acts 12:1-4)

- ✓ The first Apostle to be killed/martyred for preaching the Gospel was James the brother of John and he was also the son of Zebedee. He was often spoken of as being included in the group with John, Peter and Jesus. Some church traditions claim James ministered in the region of Spain for a season shortly after Pentecost
- ✓ This is not the same James who presides over the Jerusalem council (Acts 15), nor is it the same James who wrote the Epistle of James.
- ✓ We aren't told why Herod chose to put James to death but apparently it "met the approval among the Jews" and he will proceed to have Peter arrested next.

"It was about this time that **King Herod** arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. When he saw that this met with approval among the Jews, he **proceeded to seize Peter also**. This happened during the Festival of Unleavened Bread. **After arresting him, he put him in prison,** handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. **Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover**." (Acts 12:1-4)

- ✓ Having Peter arrested during the Festival of Unleavened Bread (an 8-day festival concluding with the celebration of the Passover, commemorating the Israelites deliverance form Egypt) would have scored points with the Jewish religious leaders as well as Herod's attempt to bring fear into the hearts of these Jesus followers.
- ✓ Peter was one of the leading spokesmen for the Gospel. By having him tried publicly, it would help to possibly discourage the other Christians and make them ineffective. The presence of a heavy guard (four squads of four soldiers) was a human attempt to hinder another escape from jail by Peter (Acts 5:19-24)

"So, **Peter was kept in prison**, but **the church was earnestly praying to God** for him. The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, **Peter was sleeping between two soldiers**, **bound with two chains**, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. "Quick, get up!" he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrists." (Acts 12:5-7)

- ✓ While Peter was in prison, Luke tells us that the church was "earnestly praying to God for him". This is a good reminder that even when things look difficult (in this case Peter was facing imminent death), **we should never doubt that God can deliver** us from what might be considered impossible and dire circumstances.

"**Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray**. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. **The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective"**. (James 5:13-16)

- ✓ Peter had complete trust and confidence in the Lord and as such he rested easily

"Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. **Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you**" (I Peter 5:6-7)

"So, Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him. The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. **Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared**, and **a light shone in the cell**. **He struck Peter on the side and woke him up**. "**Quick, get up!" he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrists**." (Acts 12:5-7)

- ✓ The circumstances here are like another incarceration that Peter experienced with the other Apostles in Acts 5

"Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. **But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out**. "Go, stand in the temple courts," he said, "and tell the people all about this new life." (Acts 5:17-20)

- ✓ In this instance (like the other experience) an angel of the Lord appears. Unique to this situation; a light shines in Peter's cell, and the angel has to wake Peter up and the chains on his wrist supernaturally fell off. All of this happened while the guards slept. This shows God's effortless power over human obstacles.

"Then **the angel said to him**, "**Put on your clothes and sandals**." And **Peter did so**. "Wrap your cloak around you and **follow me**," the angel told him. Peter followed him out of the prison, **but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision**. They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. **It opened for them by itself**, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, **suddenly the angel left him**." (Acts 12:8-10)

- ✓ As real as Luke describes this to be based on what Peter told him – he still mentions that Peter (at the time of this event) was unsure if it was a vision or whether it was happening in real time.
- ✓ It became real (a true miracle) because Peter not only made it past the first and second guards, but he also went through an iron gate which "opened for them by itself". After Peter made it safely to the street the angel left him.
- ✓ The lesson here (Just like what the Sanhedrin witnessed in Acts 5:17-20) is that no prison can hold those whom God wants out!

"Then Peter came to himself and said, "**Now I know without a doubt that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me** from Herod's clutches and from everything the Jewish people were hoping would happen." **When this had dawned on him**, **he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark**, **where many people had gathered and were praying**. Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and **a servant named Rhoda came to answer the door**. When **she recognized Peter's voice**, **she was so overjoyed** she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, "Peter is at the door!" (Acts 12:11-14)

- ✓ Peter understood that it was God who delivered him and it wasn't a dream
- ✓ We are also introduced to a few new people:
  - **John-Mark** who will travel with Paul on his first missionary journey and will also spend time with Peter. It is believed that Peter will dictate his account of the Gospel to Mark and he will go on later to record those words for others to read.
  - **Mary** (John-Mark's mother) whose home was used as a meeting place for Christians
  - **Rhoda** – a servant girl who knew Peter and was excited to see him

"You're out of your mind," they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, "**It must be his angel**." But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. **Peter** motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and **described how the Lord had brought him out of prison**. "**Tell James** and the other brothers and sisters about this," he said, and then he left for another place."
(Acts 12:15-17)

- ✓ Peter's arrival did catch the fellow believers by surprise, even though they had been praying for him to be delivered from prison.
- ✓ Some considered the possibility that it was "his angel" which was a commonly held Jewish belief in "personal/guardian angels" or some type of "spirit messenger".
- ✓ Peter gives all the credit to the Lord for miraculously delivering him from prison and his eventually death at the hand of Herod
- ✓ Peter tells them to share the news with James (the half brother of Jesus) who has become a key leader in the Jerusalem Church and then Peter moves to a safer place

"**In the morning**, there was no small commotion among the soldiers as to **what had become of Peter**. After **Herod had a thorough search made for him** and did not find him, **he cross-examined the guards and ordered that they be executed**. **Then Herod went from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there**. **He had been quarreling with the people of Tyre and Sidon; they now joined together and sought an audience with him**. After securing the support of Blastus, a trusted personal servant of the king, they asked for peace, because they depended on the king's country for their food supply." (Acts 12:18-20)

- ✓ Luke tells us that the next morning the soldiers realized that Peter was missing and a little panic broke out, given the soldiers had no explanation as to what happened
- ✓ Herod did his own investigation and ordered the guards to be executed since they failed at their duties to guard Peter until he was to be delivered for trial
- ✓ Herod leaves Judea and returns to the coastal town of Caesarea to deal with some political issues involving the people of Tyre and Sidon (Modern day Lebanon)

"**On the appointed day Herod**, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. They shouted, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man." Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, **an angel of the Lord struck him down**, and he was eaten by worms and died. **But the word of God continued to spread and flourish**. When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark." (Acts 12:21-25)

- ✓ The best way to interpret this is that the nonbelieving people were blinded to the truth and choose to worship Herod as a "god". Since Herod was a prideful man, who accepted praise for his accomplishments (although its not clear what he accomplished), instead of giving praise to the One True God, he was judged for that pride and was struck dead by the angel of the Lord.

- ✓ Instead of instilling fear into the hearts of the true believers in God, the results of Herod putting James the Apostle to death, arresting Peter, and persecuting the believers caused the Gospel of Jesus Christ to spread and flourish even more!

Some Noteworthy Scripture

"**But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin** and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while. Then he addressed the Sanhedrin: "Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered. **Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone**! Let them go! **For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail**. **But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men**; **you will only find yourselves fighting against God**." (Acts 9:1-6)

"In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, **clothe yourselves with humility toward one another**, because, "**God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble**." **Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time**. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings. And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen." (I Peter 5:5-11)

"**Consider it pure joy**, my brothers and sisters, **whenever you face trials of many kinds**, because you know that **the testing of your faith produces perseverance**. Let perseverance finish its work **so that you may be mature and complete**, not lacking anything. (James 1:2-4)

"On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. They shouted, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man." Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died. But the word of God continued to spread and flourish. **When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, <u>they returned from Jerusalem</u>, taking with them John, also called Mark**." (Acts 12:21-25)

- ✓ Paul, Barnabas and Mark will return to Jerusalem and from there will head to Antioch and set out on one of three missionary journeys that will forever change the world!!

- ✓ Peter's ministry continues in the region of Judea, and he will eventually find himself in Rome. While there he will probably write both of his Epistles (I & II Peter). Church tradition claims he is put to death by Emperor Nero probably in the year 67 AD.

- ✓ We are forever indebted to the work of Peter for his ministry to Cornelius began a shift that caused the Gospel to penetrate the Gentile world. This will continue to see its full fruit born out in the work of the Apostle Paul.