

Acts of the Apostles: Bible Study Outline #4

Overview / Outline

- **I. Peter Reports At Jerusalem (11:1-29)**

Summary: With the conversion of Cornelius and his household, remission of sins through the blood of Jesus Christ was clearly for Jew and non-Jew (Gentile) alike. Now it was time to take the soul-saving message of the gospel of Christ into the world.

Before His ascension into heaven, Jesus gave His disciples the great commission to take the gospel to all nations (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-18; Luke 24:46-49). It appears that it was the Father and Jesus Christ's intent that the spread of the gospel would follow a logical progression from Jerusalem, into Judea and Samaria, and then into the whole world (Acts 1:4-8). The gospel was first preached to those who were most familiar with the Old Testament prophecies concerning the coming of the Messiah – the Jews. They had been God's chosen people and had been entrusted with the Law of Moses which God used as a tutor to bring the nation of Israel to Christ. However, as Paul told the Galatians, after the Law brought the Jews to Christ it would have served its purpose and would no longer be needed. (Galatians 3:23-25)

Now that countless numbers of Jews had been converted to Christ through the gospel, and the infant church was rapidly spreading into Jewish communities throughout the world, it was now time to share that message with Gentiles. While Acts chapter 8 detailed the preaching of the gospel to the Samaritans, and Acts chapter 10 provided the account of the first Gentile converts, Acts chapter 11 sets the stage for the work of Saul of Tarsus (Paul) – the man whom God had chosen to take the message of Jesus Christ into the world of Greeks and Romans.

- Peter reports to the apostles in Jerusalem (11:1-18)
- Barnabas and Saul preach to Greeks in Syrian Antioch, where the disciples are first called Christians (11:19-26)
- The Christian prophet Agabus foretells a famine; relief sent to the brothers in Judea (11:27-30)

- **J. Peter's Arrest and Deliverance (12:1-25)**

Persecution against the Lord's church had become relatively commonplace to the disciples of Christ in the first century. In fact, Jesus had repeatedly warned His disciples to expect it. Stephen had been the first to die for the faith (Acts 7:57-60), and nameless others had suffered the same fate at the hands of Saul (Acts 8:1-3; 26:10). However, following Saul's conversion, persecution against the church ceased temporarily. The Sanhedrin no longer had the firebrand zealot they had enjoyed in Saul. He would do anything he could, and go to any extreme necessary, to stamp out what he believed was pure heresy and a disease that threatened his precious Jewish faith and heritage. However, while persecution by the Jewish religious leaders had been quelled, it would find new life at the hands of a man appointed by Caesar to serve as king of the Jews in Palestine. His name was Herod Agrippa.

Herod Agrippa was the grandson of the notorious Herod the Great. When Herod the Great died his kingdom was divided between his three surviving sons: Archelaus, Philip and Antipas, all of whom served Rome as tetrarchs over the region. Archelaus had been given Judea, Idumea, and Samaria; Antipas was awarded Galilee and Perea; and Philip was left with Iturea and Trachonitis. However, Archelaus, a violent man, was charged with cruelty in the manner in which he governed Judea and was subsequently banished by Caesar Augustus to Gaul. When Philip died, his region was granted by Emperor Caligula to the young up-and-coming Herod Agrippa. Soon after, Herod Antipas was likewise forced into exile for misdeeds and his tetrarchy was also awarded to Herod Agrippa.

As fate would have it, Herod Agrippa was visiting Rome at the time Caligula was assassinated. Herod's loyalty to Rome had won him many friends there, and had brought him to the attention of Claudius Caesar. To reward him for his loyalty, Claudius gave Herod the territories of Judea, Idumea, and Samaria, making the kingdom of Herod Agrippa nearly as large as the kingdom of his grandfather, Herod the Great.

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Like his grandfather, Herod Agrippa was Idumean (Edomite) – a descendent of those who had been the enemies of the Israelites in the days of Joshua and the judges. However, also like his grandfather, Herod Agrippa had adopted the religion of the Jews, more for political purposes than out of a devotion to the God of Israel. History had shown that the Jews of Palestine resented being under the rule of someone who had no knowledge of, or respect for, their religious beliefs. Therefore, to keep the peace, Rome found it expedient to appoint rulers who were both loyal to Rome and who would be least objectionable to Jewish religious and political leaders. Rome found these leaders in Herod the Great and his family.

Herod the Great had not only sought to appease the Jews by adopting their religion, but also through building projects that included significantly enlarging and adorning the Temple in Jerusalem. However, it was an uneasy, fragile peace that was constantly being threatened by Jewish zealots who wanted a Jewish king like Saul, David and Solomon. Uprisings were common. Therefore, Herod and his sons after him, had to walk a delicate balance between aggressively quelling these uprisings, while not going so far as to incur the displeasure of Rome.

The rapid spread of Christianity throughout Judea and Samaria had become a real threat to Judaism, especially since Gentiles had also become disciples of Jesus of Nazareth. This created a unique opportunity for Herod Agrippa. Herod realized he could win the favor of the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem by arresting and putting to death the leaders of the church. This act would also appease Jewish zealots and nationalists who were likewise troubled by the rapid growth of Christianity. By eliminating the leaders of the church, Herod could create for himself a real win-win situation. He would appease the Jews, maintain peace in Palestine, and ensure his kingdom by demonstrating his effective leadership to Rome. Herod became a friend of the Jews by executing the leaders of the Lord's church, but he also set himself up as an enemy of God – and for that, he would pay with his own life.

- King Herod kills James and imprisons Peter (12:1-5)
- An angel of Jehovah sets Peter free from prison (12:6-19)
- Herod struck by an angel of Jehovah (12:20-25)

• K. Paul's First Missionary Tour (13:1-52)

Summary: In the thirteenth and fourteenth chapters of Acts we read of the first missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas. This journey will cover a period of approximately two to three years. After departing from Antioch of Syria, Paul and Barnabas travel to Cyprus where they preach the gospel of Christ in Salamis and Paphos. From there, they sail to the mainland of Asia Minor where they travel through Perga to preach the gospel in the cities of Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. In all, Paul and Barnabas traveled approximately 1,200 miles (480 miles by sea) and established at least seven congregations in the process. However, it was a missionary journey during which Paul would pay a heavy price for his faithfulness. In his final letter to Timothy, the apostle Paul sought to encourage the young evangelist by recalling some of the events that took place during this first missionary journey. This would not be the last time Paul would suffer persecution for his work as an apostle of Jesus Christ. He will suffer from an undisclosed illness, be beaten and put in prison, threatened with the loss of his life, and be repeatedly accused by his enemies everywhere he went.

- Barnabas and Saul sent out as missionaries (13:1-3)
- Ministry on Cyprus; proconsul Sergius Paulus and sorcerer Elymas (13:4-12)
- Paul's speech in Antioch in Pisidia (13:13-41)
- Prophetic command to turn to the nations (13:42-52)