

ACTS 11

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to Acts chapter 11 as we continue our study through the Word of God.

In our last study back in Acts chapter 10 we see God open the door to the Gentiles as Peter let's go of his prejudices towards Gentiles and shares Christ with them and the house of Cornelius gets saved!

And Peter remains in Caesarea for a few days and then he heads back to Jerusalem and as he does, we will see some trouble brewing because word has gotten out that Peter shared with Gentiles!

Now we think that divisions are not around today, but they are. In our recent past, listen to what took place and how it affected this person. We are told,

Mahatma Gandhi shares in his autobiography that in his student days in England he was deeply touched by reading the Gospels and seriously considered becoming a convert to Christianity, which seemed to offer a real solution to the caste system that divided the people of India. One Sunday he attended church services and decided to ask the minister for enlightenment on salvation and other doctrines. But when Gandhi entered the sanctuary, the ushers refused to give him a seat and suggested that he go elsewhere to worship with his own people. He left and never came back. "If Christians have caste differences also," he said to himself, "I might as well remain a Hindu!"

We must be careful because we are all on the same playing field. We are humans first of all, descendants of Adam. And, we are all sinners that need the Savior and once we are saved we are His ambassadors, we are not our own. We have been bought with a price and our lives should reflect the nature of Jesus!

And as we will see here in Acts chapter 11, I love how this story ends. But let me not get ahead of myself. With that as our background, let's begin reading in Acts chapter 11, beginning in verse 1 and let's see what the Lord has for us as we study through His Word.

ACTS 11

VERSES 1-3

Isn't it amazing how quickly word can spread, even back then without all the social media apps we have today.

And for these Christian Jews, when they heard that Gentiles were getting saved, that Peter not only shared the Word of God with them, but he ate with them as well, they were not happy!

I am amazed at how quickly Christians can get their underwear in a bunch over personal beliefs. They will hold on to it and even when you show them the truth, they make excuses for it.

Let me give you an example. There was someone in the church who was bound by legalism and, because I did not agree with him, he would tell people, "Did you know that the pastor at Calvary Chapel leaves out parts of the Old Testament!" His point was that I was leaving out the Law, I did not teach on the Law.

Okay, to see if that is true or not all you have to do is go to our web page and you will find that we have been through every Old Testament book twice, except Genesis through Deuteronomy, that was only once because they finished up with Deuteronomy just before I came up here 22 years ago. So that is a lie.

But that is legalism and that is what we see here in Acts. Instead of rejoicing over what God was doing “**. . . those of the circumcision contended with him . . .**”

You see, the ones who were upset with Peter were those Jews who had come to Christ but were also hanging onto the Law of Moses.

Thus, when Peter ate with these Gentiles he was becoming one with them and even some Christian Jews had a hard time with this. They felt you had to become a Jew and obviously that was and is not true!

Christianity was not to become just another sect of Judaism, but it truly does stand alone. For Salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone, it is the finished work and not our working our way in!

You see, these legalists were making a difference between the Gentiles and the Jews after Peter had demonstrated that “***there is no difference!***” God had declared the Gentiles “***clean.***” They are accepted before God on the same basis as the Jews - through faith in Jesus Christ. I hope that is clear.

Why were they having such a hard time accepting Gentiles into the faith? You have to understand their history. The Jewish people developed the concept that Gentiles were only created to fuel the fires of Hell and yet the Old Testament Scriptures speak of the light of God shining upon the Gentiles also.

In Isaiah 42:6 we are told, **“I, the LORD, have called You in righteousness, And will hold Your hand; I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, As a light to the Gentiles.”**

What is interesting is that God wanted the Jews to shine the light of God to the world, but they kept it to themselves and now God was working through Gentiles to spread the light of God to a lost and dying world.

Thus, these Jews who became Christians took some of that hatred of Gentiles with them, some of those misconceptions and now they are rebuking Peter for his actions with the Gentiles, eating with them.

That is a tough position to be in. If you remember back in Acts 10 Peter even had a hard time when the Lord spoke to him about this. But he listened to the Lord and obeyed the Lord!

So, what does Peter do? Let’s read on and see!

VERSES 4-18

Notice that Peter did not say, ***“Hey, I am Peter, you better not question me!”*** No, Peter gives to them what happened in accordance with the Word of God, what God has spoken to him. And that is the way it should be. It is not about what we say, it is about what God’s Word says!

And Peter tells them all that God had done with Cornelius and his family and friends.

In fact, Luke is going to repeat what was basically said in Acts chapter 10, why?

Think about the importance of this. You see, Luke was not writing in a book, but on a scroll. The largest scrolls were thirty-five feet in length. Longer than that, they would have been too big to handle.

And so, with this limited amount of space, literature in biblical times had to be concise. Why, then, would the Holy Spirit inspire Luke to take valuable space to repeat the story of chapter 10 almost verbatim in chapter 11?

I think it is because this is such an important message as so many get caught in legalism and not doing this and doing that and God wants them to understand, that what God has called clean we are not to call common or unclean!

And, here, not just with the food restrictions, but with the Gentiles, it was important for them to understand and for us to understand that the Gospel of Grace is extended to all!

And Peter uses his life as an example of God working in him so that God can work through him.

He tells them that while he was in prayer Peter saw this vision of animals, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds all together on a sheet, both clean and unclean animals. And the Lord tells Peter to “**Rise, Peter, kill and eat.**” But, being a good Jewish boy, he says, “**Not so, Lord! For nothing common or unclean has at any time entered my mouth.**”

And the Lord told him that what God has cleansed he must not call common or unclean! And, like I have said, this is not only speaking of the dietary restrictions that are in the Scriptures, but to the Gentiles coming to the faith.

You see, the point is simple. Both Jews and Gentiles are one in Christ; there is no difference, no separation.

It is as Paul said in Galatians 3:26-29, **“For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”**

And if you remember, Peter initially had a hard time with this, but he put aside his will and surrendered to the will of God!

He continues on with this story of how he was in Joppa, and God was also working with a Gentile man in Caesarea by the name of Cornelius who was a seeker of God, he desired to know the true and living God.

And the Lord speaks to Cornelius telling him to send some men to Joppa to go and get Peter and bring him back to Caesarea and when he comes he will speak forth the Words of God, he will tell you about Jesus, he will tell you how to get saved! God was working in both the hearts and lives of Peter and Cornelius to bring this about, as I have said.

Now, as the men arrive, Peter invites them in, and the next day they head to Caesarea and Peter brings six fellow Jewish Christians to witness these things that will take place with the Gentiles.

And as Peter speaks to these Gentiles about Jesus, as he shares the Word of God with them, they believed on the Lord Jesus Christ and they were saved.

And they were not only saved but they were also empowered by the Holy Spirit to be witnesses of Jesus Christ.

What happened to the Jews on the day of Pentecost and onward was now happening to the Gentiles. It is as Isaiah 49:6 says, **“Indeed He says, ‘It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob, And to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.’”**

I think that is important for us to understand, that it was not just the work alone that validated this was a work of God, but it was the work and the Word of God together that show salvation was not just of the Jews but also of the Gentiles.

That is an important aspect for us today, that it is not just the work that proves it is of God, but the work and the Word together validating this is of God!

And then, in verse 17 we see Peter sum this up by basically saying, ***“If God made no distinction between Jews and Gentiles then, how could he?”***

You see, this was not something that Peter was doing, but what God was doing through Peter.

May we be that sensitive to the Spirit’s leading and not put God in a box or limit what He wants to do. May we see the work and the Word working together as the Spirit is moving!

How did the Jewish Christians respond to what Peter said? They went to another church! No, that is not what they did!

Listen again to what we are told in verse 18 of Acts chapter 11, **“When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, ‘Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.’”**

Notice, at first they were silent but it would have been hard to argue with what Peter said. They took it all in and they did not react too quickly. What they did was they pondered what they heard, and I am sure they were seeking direction from God.

And when they put the work that was being done alongside the Word of God, they came to the conclusion that this is of God. And they were so glad that they glorified God. That tells me that their hearts were open to God, they were not hard-hearted to what God was doing and thus, they received it with gladness!

You see, they were able to put aside their prejudices and traditions and embrace God's Word and work, that salvation has come to the Gentiles without them becoming Jews and keeping the Law of Moses!

What a great lesson for us to learn, to be open to what God is doing, that our hearts are soft so He can mold them and shape them.

Too often Christians become hard-hearted, set in their ways, they are insensitive to the things of God, to the Holy Spirit and thus, God can't mold and shape them until they receive the refreshing waters of the Holy Spirit back into their lives, that they are not interested in their will but His will being done!

Make no mistake about it, this is a powerful passage, demonstrating that the hearts of the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem were soft enough to be guided and corrected by God. It is a glorious thing when God's people will allow their prejudices and traditions to be overcome by God's Word and God's work.

VERSE 19

Let me give you an idea where they were going when they were scattered from Jerusalem due to the persecution against these Jewish Christians.

Phoenicia, which is modern day Lebanon, is located in the coastal plain north of Israel on the Mediterranean Sea.

Two cities that you may remember from this area are Tyre and Sidon. And from either of these two cities you could catch a ship going west to Cyprus.

Again, they are being scattered and some did take a ship to Cyprus while others moved farther north, up the coast to the area of Antioch, which became the capitol of Syria.

But notice that these brethren were only preaching to the Jews because at this point they still believed that salvation was only for the Jews. Obviously, there were still some struggles in preaching to the Gentiles and at this point, this was right after Stephen was martyred and these Jews were not aware yet about what God was going to do with the Gentiles. So, these Jews only shared with other Jews about Jesus as persecution drove them out of Jerusalem.

But these walls were going to eventually come down; there were a lot of things God needed to purge out of them just as He does with us!

Look at what some were doing, how those walls were coming down as we read on in Acts 11:20!

VERSES 20-21

Here we see that some Jewish Christians were preaching Christ to the Gentiles in Antioch. We are told that they spoke to the “**Hellenists**” and this word means “Greeks.” In other words, these unnamed Jewish Christians preached Christ to the Gentiles in Antioch, not necessarily Greek speaking Jews.

Now the city of Antioch was much like Las Vegas of today, full of immorality. It was the third largest city in the world at that time, just behind Rome and Alexandria.

Keep in mind that Antioch was founded about 300 B. C. by Seleucus I, one of the inheritors of Alexander the Great's empire. He liked to make a city and name them after his father, Antioch, and he did this about fifteen times.

This city of Antioch was called "Syrian Antioch" or "Antioch on the Orontes." In the first century it was a city of more than half a million people; today it is a Turkish city with a population of about 3,500.

It was located about 300 miles north of Jerusalem and about 20 miles inland from the Mediterranean Sea. Antioch was known for its business and commerce, for its sophistication and culture, but also for its immorality.

Bruce summed up what it was like there in Antioch like this, "The city's reputation for moral laxity was enhanced by the cult of Artemis and Apollo at Daphne, five miles distant, where the ancient Syrian worship of Astarte and her consort, with its ritual prostitution, was carried on."

But now, this city of more than a half a million people had the Good News of Jesus Christ shine upon their darkness and they were brought into the light. God was doing a great work here as many got saved and yet, we don't know the names of the people doing the work, why? Because they were just the instruments that God used and thus, He gets the glory and not man!

Also keep in mind that Antioch was the home church for Paul and Barnabas.

VERSES 22-24

I love what happens here. Word spread quickly to Jerusalem what was going on in Antioch. And who do they send to help out in this work in Antioch? They send Barnabas or Son of Encouragement, the Son of Comfort to them!

That should just make sense. You would not send the Son of Discouragement or the Son of Misery to these people, and yet, some in ministry, that is just what they bring.

What a joy it is and should be to serve the Lord and what a joy it is for me to see the men and women God has brought into this body to do the work of the ministry and doing it faithfully and joyfully unto Him!

What an honor and what a privilege it is and for Barnabas, that joy was caught by others, that joy he had in serving the Lord.

And as Barnabas gets to Antioch he rejoices in what he sees, and he exhorts the people to continue on in the Lord, to continue on with the Lord. Notice that he doesn't say in the work, but in the Lord. I believe you must walk with the Lord, abide with the Lord and as you are in Him He will work through you and you will bring forth much fruit.

Hear me out on this. You must purpose (set before you) in your heart to cleave to God. It is an act of the will you make every day.

Why is that? Because Satan has purposed in his heart to tear you from God, to separate you from God through sin.

And here is the thing. You choose who you will obey!

Make no mistake about it, the church is not only to be a witness of Christ, but they are to build the people up in the faith. They are to feed the sheep, tend to the sheep, care for the sheep so they can grow and mature and then go out and do the work of the ministry themselves!

It is as Paul said in Ephesians 4:11-16, **“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors [teachers] and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head - Christ - from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”**

If you do not grow in the Lord, if you distance yourself from Him, you will be tossed to and fro by the false winds of doctrine that come blowing through the church and they are really blowing today!

VERSES 25-26

As you can see, things were happening in Antioch and Barnabas was part of that work. And it wasn't that he wasn't doing a good job, but Mr. Encouragement and I think Mr. Humility knows someone who is perfect for this work, Saul of Tarsus, the one he stood up for in Jerusalem when they were not too sure about his conversion experience. And now some 12 years or so have passed, and he did not forget Saul.

Barnabas travels and searches out for Saul, the Greek word is ANAZETTEO and it means “to search up and down, or high and low.”

He didn't give up until he found him and brought him back to Antioch where Saul and Barnabas ministered for one year, spreading forth the Good News of Jesus Christ!

This is an important lesson for us and especially for me. I can't do it all, you can't do it all, and if there is someone who is better, let them serve.

You see, how important that is, to recognize a gift in someone and then encourage them to use it even if it means you will be replaced by them!

It is not about us, it is about Jesus and the building up of the Kingdom of God. Thus, the body of Christ is made up of many different people with many different gifts that are to be used and what an honor it is to encourage someone to step forward and see them grow and use the gift that God has given them.

One of the greatest joys I have as a pastor is to see this happen to people and the joy they have in serving, being used by God.

Now I have seen people who were in leadership at one time tell people who wanted to get involved in ministry, "No, we don't need your help, we do that!" Thank God that was a long time ago and I have not heard that since, but how sad.

We need to get out of the way and let God work and use people for His glory, not hold them back. We need to be a Barnabas, Sons and Daughters of Encouragement!

Also notice that in Antioch the believers were called Christians or Christ-followers and it was a put down, a derogatory name, and yet, for these Christ-followers, they loved it and wore the name as a badge of honor, for that was their desire and it is our desire, to be like Christ.

Eusebius, the famous early church historian, described a believer named Sanctus from Lyons, 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 only replied, “I am a Christian.” “What nation do you belong to?” He answered, “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 his only reply. No matter what they asked about him, he only answered, “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*)

VERSES 27-30

Here we see this prophet by the name of Agabus. And he told of a famine that was coming and it was going to be severe! This famine probably took place around 45 to 46 A. D. In fact, several ancient writers attest to that fact, including Tacitus (Annals XI.43), Josephus (Antiquities XX.ii.5), and Suetonius (Claudius 18).

Bruce tells us, “We know from other sources that Claudius’s principate (the rule of the early Roman emperors, during which some features of republican government were retained) was marked by a succession of bad harvests and consequent scarcity in various parts of the empire – in Rome, Greece, and Egypt as well as in Judaea.”

Thus, in Jerusalem things were tough for the Christian Jews. They lost their jobs, their families as they came to Christ, the persecution was on the increase. And this famine made things even worse.

And when the disciples in Antioch heard this, these Gentiles in Antioch sent Saul and Barnabas some 300 miles to Jerusalem with relief, with money to help them out!

Look at how the love of Jesus broke down those walls of division and there is a need and these Gentile Christians respond, they were determined to take care of that need that those in Jerusalem, their brethren had.

It has been wisely said that we make a living by what we get. But we make a life by what we give.

There was life in the early church because they gave. After hearing the word of prophecy, they didn't say, "Wow, there's going to be a drought, huh? We better store our beans, buy guns, get gold, and build shelters." No, they said, "There's a drought? Let's take an offering. Tough times? How can we help?"

That is what we are to be about.

Now as we move into chapter 12 of Acts we are going to see the persecution in Jerusalem intensify.

ACTS 12

VERSES 1-2

Here we see the persecution against believers growing and James is put to death by Herod.

Now there were a lot of Herod's and that tends to make things very confusing, so let me see if I can simplify it for you.

Herod the Great was the one who had the Jewish children in Bethlehem put to death after the birth of Jesus, trying to kill this child king.

His grandson was Herod Agrippa I, and that is who is spoken of here. Herod Agrippa I was the nephew of Herod Antipas who was involved in the trial of Jesus.

And here we see James, the brother of John, the sons of Zebedee, one of the 12 apostles, killed or martyred for his faith by Herod Agrippa I.

And when it says, “**with the sword**” that normally meant beheading and I think that is what happened here. James was beheaded for his faith in Christ!

Interestingly enough, Eusebius relates a story from Clement of Alexandria, who says that the soldier who guarded James until his execution was so affected by his witness that he was willingly executed for Christ alongside of James (Eusebius, 2.9.2-3)

We don't know for sure if that happened or not, but we do know what Paul said in Romans 8:28, “**And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.**”

There will be good that comes out of the situations we find ourselves in, and even in death God is working for good through those times!

Now here's the thing. Man may try to put out the light, but in doing so those embers that were smashed are now spread out far and wide and thus, the light is not extinguished but it is spread out even further.

And keep in mind that this is the apostle James and not the half-brother of Jesus.

VERSES 3-4

Notice the reason that Herod I arrested Peter. It was not because it was the right thing to do, not because he thought this was good and it needed to be done because Peter committed some crime. It was because it made him more popular with the Jews!

The Jews were excited to see these Christians put to death because to them, they were nothing more than troublemakers.

So as James is put to death, Peter is now arrested and because it is the Feast of Passover and Unleavened bread, Herod was going to wait till after the feast and then he would put Peter to death also.

And we see that Peter is placed in prison and has twice the number of guards watching over him, maybe so he wouldn't escape like he did last time. (Acts 5:17-21)

Two soldiers were chained to Peter, one on each side, the other two were guarding the door and every 6 hours they would have a shift rotation, a new group of guards would come in to relieve the other ones. He was not going to escape this time, or so they thought!

Stott said that, "Normally it was considered enough for a prisoner to be handcuffed to one soldier, but as a special precaution Peter had a soldier each side of him and both his wrists were manacled [bound, chained]."

So, there is no way for Peter to escape this time, humanly speaking of course!

As we read on notice what the other believers were doing during this time.

VERSE 5

The word "**constant**" comes from a Greek word that was a medical term speaking of a muscle that was stretched to its limits.

This same Greek word was used in the garden in regard to the prayer by Jesus in Luke 22:44 where we read, "**And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.**"

They were earnestly, fervently praying for the release of Peter, knowing what already happened to James!

Think of it like this. Peter may have been bound in prison; he may have been in chains, but the people of God unleashed prayer for his situation, for his release.

It is as John 15:7 says, “**If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.**”

Now think about Herod and the power he had. Herod had his soldiers and his prisons. That sounds great. There is no way he will lose on this one, right? That is not right, and the reason being is that the church had the power of prayer. The outcome would soon be seen, and easily decided.

May we not forget the power of prayer! It is not about physical power, intellect, money, positions, it is about our God and how God wants to show Himself strong through us. ***PRAYER!***

VERSES 6-11

Peter is in prison, chained to 2 guards with 2 guards watching the doors and the shift would change, as I have said, every 6 hours.

He is going to be put to death in the morning and what is Peter doing?

Peter is sleeping! How could he sleep at a time like this knowing he is going to be put to death in the morning?

It is as Peter said in I Peter 5:7, “**casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.**” Cast all your worry, all your anxiety upon the Lord and rest in Him, let His peace fill your life as it did Peter’s, even during the most difficult trials!

In Psalm 127:2 we are told, **“It is vain for you to rise up early, To sit up late, To eat the bread of sorrows; For so He gives His beloved sleep.”**

Here we see this angel give Peter a little punch to awaken him. And then Peter is told to put your sandals on, get your robe and let’s go.

I think that is important. Yes, God will do amazing things, but we must learn to walk, to take those steps of faith. A great lesson for us to follow.

Now Peter, as he is being lead out of this prison, still thinks he is dreaming, that this escape was not real until he was out of the prison, passed all the guards, and then he realized this was done by God, he is free!

Now here is something that some people struggle with. Why did James die and Peter was set free? Only God knows, He is Sovereign.

But the thing to remember for the Christian is that death is not the cessation of life, it is only the beginning as we will spend eternity with the Lord and not apart from Him in the Lake of Fire as those who reject Him will!

That is an amazing story and some feel that this was just for the first century church, these things don’t happen today. I disagree. God is the same yesterday, today and forever! I still think God works in many different ways. Let me give you this example. We are told,

“F. F. Bruce relates the story of Sundar Singh, a Tibetan Christian who was likewise freed miraculously from a prison. For his preaching of the gospel, he was thrown into a well, and a cover was put over it and securely locked. He would be left in the well until he died, and he could see the bones and rotting corpses of those who had already perished in there.

On the third night of his imprisonment, he heard someone unlocking the cover of the well and removing it. A voice told him to take hold of the rope that was being lowered. Sundar was grateful that the rope had a loop he could put his foot in, because he had injured his arm in the fall down into the well. He was raised up, and the cover was replaced and locked, but when he looked to thank his rescuer he could find no one.

When morning came, he went back to the same place he was arrested and started preaching again. News of the preaching came to the official who had him arrested, and Sundar was brought before him again. When the official said someone must have gotten the key and released him, they searched for the key – and found it on the official’s own belt. God is still writing the book of Acts!”

VERSES 12-14

As Peter is out on the streets he realized it was not a good idea to remain out in the open, so he heads to the house of Mary whose son was John Mark, the writer of the Gospel According to Mark, and probably a frequent gathering place for the church.

There are traditions that say that the Last Supper was at her house.

And if you remember from our study of Mark, he later joined with Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey. However, half way through the first missionary journey, Mark got homesick and he decided to go home. We’ll read about that shortly here in the book of Acts.

So as Peter arrives at Mary’s house he knocks on the door and Rhoda answers it. Upon hearing Peter’s voice, she was so excited, that she forgot to open the door and let him in. Instead she went running to tell everyone that Peter is free!

You have to love this. Can you see Peter outside, “Rhoda, Rhoda, open the door! Rhoda, where did you go? Come on Rhoda, its Peter!”

VERSE 15

I love this story. Think about this for a minute. What were they praying for? The release of Peter!

When Rhoda said Peter was at the door what did they say? They told Rhoda she was out of her mind, she was crazy, maybe it was Peter’s guardian angel, but it can’t be Peter, he was still locked in prison.

Can you see this in your mind, “Come on guys, let’s continue to pray! Dear Lord, please release Peter, let him go. Don’t let him be put to death like what happened to James!”

It is kind of funny. They may have been praying earnestly for Peter’s release, but they had very little faith that Peter was going to be released!

Have you ever prayed for something and then you were surprised when God answered it? That is what was going on here. It only takes a small amount of faith because it is all about God and His power, His will. May we learn to trust Him and when we pray that we do so with the faith that God can answer those prayers!

One writer put it like this, “I wonder if sometimes we put an over emphasis even on our faith as a necessity for answered prayer. Because obviously they didn’t have faith! God works in sovereign ways His wonders to perform! And though there was a lack of faith in their prayers, still God answered the prayers. Have you ever been surprised when God answered your prayer? I have! I’ve prayed earnestly for things. And when God answered, wow! I can’t believe it! And so they were.” (Author Unknown)

VERSES 16-17

Keep in mind that Peter is still outside waiting for someone to open the door and when it was opened, they were astonished to see Peter standing there!

As Peter comes inside he tells them what God had done, answering their prayer and then he tells them to let James know.

Obviously, this is not the brother of John; he was already put to death. This is James the half-brother of Jesus, the one who wrote the epistle of James and the leader of the church in Jerusalem!

After this we don't hear much about Peter, the focus will be on Paul. And yes, there are some extra-biblical sources, which we don't know how accurate they are, that speak about him, but the Scriptures are silent for the most part.

We have I and II Peter and Paul mentions Peter as Paul had to rebuke him but nothing else except a brief appearance in Acts chapter 15. Peter walks off the pages of the Book of Acts to make room for Paul and the story of his ministry among the Gentiles.

We see that I Corinthians 9:5 tells us that Peter traveled in ministry with his wife, and I Corinthians 1:12 suggests that he visited Corinth.

There is no evidence in Scripture that Peter ever visited Rome. In fact, if Peter had founded the church in Rome, it is unlikely that Paul would have gone there, for his policy was to work where other Apostles had not labored (Rom. 15:18–22). Also, he certainly would have said something to or about Peter when he wrote his letter to the Romans.

VERSES 18-19

To say that Herod was upset was an understatement. They let his prized prisoner go, the one who was to be executed and help him get in good with the Jews for his persecution of Christians.

Thus, those guards were put to death, which was the rule. If you let a prisoner escape you would have to serve out his sentence and thus, Peter was to be put to death and since he escaped, his guards, these soldiers were put to death instead!

In I Peter 3:12 we are told, **“For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the LORD is against those who do evil.”**

God looked upon Peter and Peter was at peace. God hears the prayers of the saints and Peter was released. And God is going to judge Herod for his wicked ways! We are going to see God deal with Herod next.

VERSES 20-23

We don't know why, but Herod was mad at the people of Tyre and Sidon. And since he dispensed the food, they are trying to butter him up and get back on his good side.

As Herod came to the auditorium in Caesarea the sun glistened off his silver thread robe and the people of Tyre and Sidon shouted out **“The voice of a god and not of a man!”**

Pride filled his heart and in the end, it ate at him and finally destroyed him from the inside out! Luke tells us that, **“. . . he was eaten by worms and died.”**

Listen to how the ancient Jewish historian, Josephus describes the death of Herod. He said,

He put on a garment made wholly of silver, and of a contexture truly wonderful, and came into the theatre early in the morning; at which time the silver of his garment, being illuminated by the fresh reflection of the sun's rays upon it, shone out after a surprising manner, and was so resplendent as to spread a horror over those that looked intently upon him; and presently his flatterers cried out, one from one place, and another from another place (though not for his good), that he was a god . . . A severe pain also arose in his belly, and began in a most violent manner . . . when he had been quite worn out by the pain in his belly for five days, he departed this life.

- Antiquities, XIX.8.2

Make no mistake about it. History is filled with the stories of men who thought they could fight God and succeed; their ruined lives are evidence that it can't be done. They thought they were gods, but they died like men!

Friedrich Nietzsche was the philosopher who coined the idea that God was dead, and that Christianity was a despised religion of weaklings. Fighting God drove him insane, and he spent the last several years of his life in that condition.

Sinclair Lewis won the Nobel Prize for literature and fought against God in his book *Elmer Gantry*. The book was about an evangelist who was also an alcoholic and would sleep with any woman he could. Sinclair Lewis died a hopeless alcoholic in a clinic near Rome.

Writer Ernest Hemingway lived his life of adventure and sin against God seemingly without consequences – until he shot himself in the head with a shotgun.

Fighting against God just doesn't work. And we will see what does stand in the end and it is not man who is in opposition to God, as we have seen here.

But let me just say this regarding Herod and the Herod's of this world. Herod, who was a descendant of Esau or a man of the field or the world is a type of the natural man.

What do I mean by that? He was proud, he was arrogant, he was his own god and he refused to give glory to the true and living God.

And in the end, he is judged by God – eaten by worms!

The Herod's of this world come and go but the Word of God abides forever. That is what we read next.

VERSES 24-25

Make no mistake about it, you can't stop the work of God and those who have tried are gone and God's work continues on, as we have seen.

It is the Word and work of God that moves forward as we are told in Psalm 33:10-11, **“The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; He makes the plans of the peoples of no effect. The counsel of the LORD stands forever, The plans of His heart to all generations.”**

Herod was put to death and the church was blessed and continued on, the gates of Hell will not prevail over His Church and it hasn't and it won't!

So, Barnabas and Saul now return to Antioch after they brought aid to the Christian Jews in Jerusalem, as we read back in Acts chapter 11.

And as they leave Jerusalem they take with them back to Antioch the nephew of Barnabas, John Mark.

Now, as we move into chapter 13 next time, we will move into another ministry, the ministry of Paul and Barnabas and the third part of the book of Acts as now the Gospel message is being moved to the uttermost parts of the earth!

And what we will see is that the first team that was sent out was not from the church in Jerusalem, but from the church in Antioch. And from now on, the church in Antioch will become the main church of that time. The missionary activities and the spread of the gospel will no longer be from the church in Jerusalem but from the church in Antioch.

What I want to leave you with this evening as we finish up is that we must not lose hope in the work of God because the plans and purposes of God will come to pass, the Word of God will come to pass, no matter how man may try to stop it, as we have seen!

And I will close with these words from Paul as he said, “**Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.**” I Corinthians 15:58.