

Commentary on Acts chapters 12 and 13:1-12 by Chuck Smith 3.26.23

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March memory verse 1 Peter 1:25 (NKJV)

But the word of the LORD endures forever." Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.

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Chapter 12

Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church ([Act 12:1](#)).

There are just a lot of Herods in the Bible and it is a little difficult to keep them all straight. This particular Herod was Herod Agrippa I. He was the grandson of Herod the Great who was the Herod at the time of the birth of Jesus.

And he killed James the brother of John with the sword ([Act 12:2](#)).

James and John were called by Jesus the sons of thunder. They requested one day that they be granted to sit one at the right hand and the other at the left hand of Jesus when He was in His kingdom. And Jesus said, "Are you able to be baptized with the baptism whereof I will be baptized?" And they said, "Yes, Lord, we are able." Jesus was talking about His death and Jesus said, "Ye shall indeed be baptized with the baptism wherein I was baptized: but to grant to you to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is something really that isn't really in my jurisdiction, that is given to the Father" ([Matthew 20:23](#)). So James, the brother of John is now following his Lord in martyrdom.

And when Herod Agrippa saw this pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.) ([Act 12:3](#))

On the fourteenth of Nissan they began the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and so it was during this Feast of Passover that Peter was arrested. Now according to their law, during the times of the Feast of Passover, they could not have any trial, and so he determined to bring him forth at the end of the Feast of Passover. And you say, "Well, Jesus was tried during the Feast of Passover." Correct, good students! But it was a thoroughly illegal trial. There were several illegal aspects of the trial of Jesus Christ. But he was intending to bring him forth for judgment and, of course, for execution at the end of the Passover period.

And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him ([Act 12:4](#));

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Now a quaternion was actually four soldiers. As a rule, a prisoner was chained, his right hand to the left hand of the guard. In Peter's case, because they wanted to keep him sure, he was chained on both sides to guards, and then there were two guards who would stand watch at the door and four quaternions would mean that there were four groups of four soldiers. They served in three-hour shifts around the clock in guarding the prisoner. So there were sixteen soldiers altogether watching Peter in three-hour shifts, at all times chained to two of them while two were watching the door.

and they intended ([Act 12:4](#))

intending after Passover to bring him forth to the people. Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him. And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison. And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off of his hands. And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did ([Act 12:4-8](#)).

Gird yourself means to tie your skirt on up. When they would gird themselves, and the purpose of it is they would wear these long robes kind of things. Well, it's hard to run in a robe. I've never really tried it, but I can imagine it would be difficult to run in a robe. And so they would gird themselves up, that is, they would take the sash and they would pull the robe up to the knees and then they would tie the sash so that the robe would then be short and they could run faster. So he said, "Gird yourself up."

Gird yourself up and tie on your sandals. And so he did. And he said unto him, Put your garment on, and follow me. And so he went out, and followed him; and he knew not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision ([Act 12:8-9](#)).

"It can't be real. These chains have fallen off; I'm walking past these guards. This can't be real; it's just a dream. This is just a vision, it's not really happening." That, to me, is very interesting how close the spiritual world was to these men. Where they really didn't know if it was reality or just some spiritual revelation. But they lived very close to the spiritual world, to the spirit world.

When they were past the first and the second ward, they came to the iron gate that leads into the city; which opened to them of its own accord: and they went out, and they passed through one street; and then the angel departed from him. Now when Peter was come to himself, he said, I know of a surety, that the Lord has sent his angel, and has delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews ([Act 12:10-11](#)).

Finally, when the angel left and Peter was standing on the street, he said, "Hey, it wasn't a dream. I am out! Unreal!" And he realized that God had delivered him from the hand of Herod.

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And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying ([Act 12:12](#)).

Now go back to verse 5 where it says, "But prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for Peter." So Peter came to the house where the prayer meeting was being held. The house of Mary the mother of Mark. John Mark who is the author of the Gospel according to Mark. It is thought that her house was pretty much the headquarters of the church in Jerusalem. In fact, it is thought by some that the upper room was actually in the house of Mary the mother of Mark.

And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, whose name was Rhoda. And when she knew Peter's voice, she did not open the gate for gladness, but ran in [scatter-brained girl], and told how that Peter was standing at the gate. But they said unto her, [You're crazy.] But she constantly affirmed that it was true. Then said they, It must be his angel ([Act 12:13-15](#)).

This, to me, is quite fascinating. Going back to verse 5. Peter therefore was kept in prison, but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him. So he comes to the place where the prayer meeting is being held. They're all inside praying, "Oh God, help Peter! Oh Lord, deliver Peter" and all. Now Rhoda comes running in and says, "Peter's out at the gate." And they said, "You're crazy!" Isn't it interesting how much emphasis we often put on faith. "You gotta have faith brother! If you don't have faith, God's not going to answer your prayers."

Let me tell you something. God's going to do what God wants to do whether you have faith or not. The purposes of God are going to stand. Surely you cannot accuse these people of praying the prayer of faith. Because when they are told that God has answered the prayer, Peter's at the door and they don't believe it, they accuse the poor little girl of being crazy. Then they said, "Well, it must be his angel. It must be his spirit. Surely it can't be Peter!"

But Peter just kept knocking: and so when they opened the door, they saw him, and they were astonished. But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace [Don't make too big of a stir, fellows. They'll find out I'm here], he declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go show these things unto James ([Act 12:16-17](#)),

Now at this point we are introduced to James, who became one of the leaders in the early church, who was a half brother to Jesus. And he began to take a very strong role of leadership in the early church. James the brother of John has been put to death by Herod. But this other James, who will write an epistle after his name and will take a role of leadership in the council in Jerusalem, is not the James of the gospel, except that Mark does name him as one of the half brothers of Jesus. So introducing you now to James, half brother to Jesus, who will now begin to take a more dominant role in the early church. So Peter says to go show these things unto James.

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and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place ([Act 12:17](#)).

James the half brother of Jesus did not believe the claims of Jesus during His lifetime. In fact, James thought that his brother Jesus was mad, and at one time sought to rescue Him from the crowd. He said, "He's beside Himself" and they came down to rescue Him., Jesus, after His resurrection, did appear unto James as Paul tells us in [1 Corinthians 15:7](#). He made an appearance to his half brother and after that point his half brother James and His half brother Jude became pillars in the early church.

And so, "Go show these things to James and to the brethren and he departed and went to another place." He figured that they would be coming to Mary's house looking for him and so he, no doubt, went to hide out from Herod. So he went to another place.

Now, here we have an interesting enigma. Herod stretched forth his hand against the church and he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And he put Peter in prison intending to bring him forth for trial and execution, but God intervened and miraculously delivered Peter. Question. Why didn't God intervene and miraculously deliver James? Now don't try to figure out an answer, because we don't know.

The ways of God are beyond our finding out. We know that God could have delivered James by a miracle even as He delivered Peter. But for some reason, God did not see fit to deliver James, but allowed James to fall prey to Herod's sword. Though He did see fit that Peter should be delivered from Herod's sword. And I don't think the prayers of the church were the deciding factor, because as we noted, the prayers obviously were not prayers of faith.

I believe the deciding factor was just the purpose of God, the sovereignty of God. As far as God was concerned, it was James' time to come home; it wasn't Peter's time yet. I believe that all of our lives are bound within the purposes of God and that God knows the day in which He's going to take me home. It's all set. God knows exactly the day and the circumstances by which He's going to take me home. And God has, in the meantime, a work for me to do, and until I have accomplished that work that God has in mind for me to do, God's going to preserve me and keep me until that day. But the moment I have accomplished that purpose of God and plan for my life, then God's going to take me home.

In the book of Revelation, chapter 11, we read concerning the two witnesses that come to bare witness during the tribulation period upon the earth. And it says that they have power to call down fire from heaven. They have power to shut up heaven, that it does not rain during this period of their prophecy. And if anybody should try to take them, they can call down fire from heaven and consume them. And yet the scripture said, "And when they shall have finished their testimony," then the antichrist has power to put them to death, but not until they have finished their testimony.

So obviously God was not yet through with Peter. There was more work for him to do. Thus, God preserved him. However, outside of the council in Jerusalem, this is the last

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mention of Peter that we have in the book of Acts. Chapter 15 he'll speak up and again tell how God had led him to the Gentiles, but Peter passes on from the picture. Paul tells us in Galatians how he came to the church in Antioch, caused some trouble that Paul had to rebuke him for. Some of our other records tells us that he went to Rome and was there crucified upside down. And, of course, he wrote his epistles. But as far as the record in the book of Acts, it shifts now from the church in Jerusalem and beginning in with chapter 13, Antioch becomes the center of church activity. Jerusalem passes as the center of the church's activity and now moves to Antioch, and all of the missionary activity in taking the Gospel into all of the world centers out of the church in Antioch. So meanwhile, back at the prison...

Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter ([Act 12:18](#)).

I mean, they woke up and here Peter was gone, and you can imagine the stir that this must have created among these guards to find Peter gone.

And when Herod had sought for Peter, and found him not, he cross-examined the keepers, and commanded that they should be put to death ([Act 12:19](#)).

For according to the Roman law, if you were guarding a prisoner and he escaped from you, then you received the sentence that would have been given to the prisoner. Which shows that he was planning to put Peter to death. The soldiers who were the guards over Peter were put to death, taking the sentence that was to be placed upon Peter.

And he went down from Judea to Caesarea, and he stayed there. Now Herod was highly displeased with those that were from Tyre and Sidon ([Act 12:19-20](#)):

Cities that exist to the present day that have been in the news quite a bit of late as Israel has gone into southern Lebanon. And we hear almost daily of the tensions that exists with the Israeli occupation forces and the people of Sidon and Tyre today. And these people depended upon Palestine for their food supplies, and so they were pretty much a vassal to Palestine at this time. But Herod was angry with them.

but they came with one accord to him, because they had made a friend of Blastus the king's chamberlain, and they desired peace; because their country was nourished by the king's country [or by Palestine]. And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man ([Act 12:20-22](#)).

Of course, they were seeking to flatter him in order that they might gain his favor and his help.

And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he did not give God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and he died ([Act 12:23](#)).

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Now according to Josephus, it was into an outdoor theater that Herod came, according to Josephus, with this fabulous robe made of silver cloth. And as he came into the theater, the sun reflected off of this silver cloth. So he came in like a shining god, making this speech to the people and, of course, the people began to cry, "It's the voice of a god, not of a man!" And because he did not give God glory, he was smitten by an angel and there died.

So the end of Herod Agrippa I. We will deal with Herod Agrippa II, his son, in a few weeks as we move on in the book of Acts.

But the word of God grew and multiplied. And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry ([Act 12:24-25](#)),

Remember they had taken up an offering. Agabus had come to Antioch and predicted a great drought was going to come, and so they took up a collection to take back to the saints in Jerusalem. So Paul and Barnabas had come back to Jerusalem with this collection that was taken from the church in Antioch. And now Paul and Barnabas are returning back to Antioch, and John Mark, who is a nephew to Barnabas, is returning with them.

Chapter 13

Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; Barnabas, Simeon that was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul ([Act 13:1](#)).

Interesting the backgrounds of these men. Barnabas was from the island of Cyprus. Simeon who was called Niger, which, of course, is the Roman term for a black person. Simeon is Hebrew name. Lucius who was from Cyrene, and Manaen, who had been around Herods, grew up in the royal court. And also Saul, who had that very interesting background of being born in Tarsus, schooled in Jerusalem.

God had brought them together and they were the teachers and the prophets there in the church in Antioch.

As they ministered to the Lord ([Act 13:2](#)),

Interesting statement to me. These men were ministering to the Lord, but their ministry to the Lord involved their ministry to the people, because that's what the Lord had called them to do. Now Paul later writes and says, "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all to the glory of God. And you're to do it as unto the Lord, knowing that of the Lord you're going to receive your reward" ([Colossians 3:17,23-24](#)). And I think that this is an important point for anyone who endeavors any ministry for the Lord: that you recognize that God has called you to minister to people. But in reality, that's your job as His servant. In other words, as the servant of God, He has called me to minister to people.

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Now ministering to people can be very frustrating. It can be worse than that; it can be very irritating. People don't often appreciate what you've tried to do for them or people can be just obnoxious. And there are times when I find myself grumbling over the demands that people have made on me. And in those times the Lord speaks to me and He says, "Who are you serving? Whose servant are you?" And I say, "I'm Your servant Lord." And He says, "Quit your griping. Do it as unto Me. You're serving Me by serving people." And thus, I've learned to do a lot of things that are not as attractive or interesting as things that I would choose to do. I've had to do some pretty rank things for the Lord.

So notice it says they were ministering unto the Lord. They had the right concept of the ministry. But their ministry unto the Lord involved their serving the people. Teaching them, helping them, strengthening them, and that was their service to God.

and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them ([Act 13:2](#)).

Now how do you suppose the Holy Spirit said this? It says very plainly that the Holy Spirit said, and I believe that the Holy Spirit did say it, but how did He say it? Were they just sitting there and a voice came in? And if so, was it a deep resonant voice? Or was it a high-pitched voice? What kind of a voice do you suppose the Holy Spirit has? The fact that it tells us that there were prophets in the church I believe that it was spoken through the word of prophecy by one of those who had the gift of prophesy, and thus, they were directed by prophetic word through one of the men. That the prophetic word came, separate Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. Thus, the Holy Spirit spake through one of the prophets these words.

Later on, Paul the apostle, as he is writing to Timothy concerning those gifts that had become dormant in his life, he told him to stir up the gifts that are in you that were given to you at the time that hands were laid upon you and the word of prophecy was given.

So in the early church they did have a practice of laying hands on people, praying for them, and oftentimes a word of prophecy would come as a guide or as a direction for that person. So this gift was exercised in the early church, the gift of prophecy and, no doubt, the Holy Spirit, through this prophetic type of gift, speaking forth the Word of God, said to separate Saul and Barnabas for the work where God has called them.

And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Spirit ([Act 13:3-4](#)),

Now in verse 3 we have, "They fasted and prayed, laid their hands on them and sent them away," but the next verse tells us that it was actually the Holy Spirit that sent them forth.

departed unto Seleucia; and from there they sailed to Cyprus ([Act 13:4](#)).

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Now Antioch is about fifteen miles up the Orontes River from the coast. And so they came down to the coast, the fifteen miles to Seleucia, got a boat and headed off for Cyprus on the first missionary journey.

And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they also had John (John Mark) as their servant ([Act 13:5](#)).

He was a young man and he had gone along to just take care of a lot of the menial things that needed taken care of as a servant to Paul and Barnabas.

And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos ([Act 13:6](#)),

They had gone pretty much the length of the island of Cyprus.

they found a certain sorcerer ([Act 13:6](#)),

Paphos was the capitol of Cyprus at that time.

they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-jesus: which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man ([Act 13:6-7](#));

Sergius Paulus once was a governor over the island of Cyprus. The people in that day were very superstitious kind of people and most of the rulers had their own wizards who they would seek counsel from.

who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) [Bar-jesus interprets into Elymas] withstood them, seeking to turn the deputy away from the faith. Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) [Saul is his Hebrew name. Paul is his Greek name.] filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him. And he said, O full of all subtlety and all mischief, you child of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand ([Act 13:7-11](#)).

Then the deputy [Sergius Paulus], when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord. ([Act 13:12](#)).