

In the previous passage, Herod Agrippa had executed James who was one of Jesus' leading disciples. When he saw that it pleased the Jews, he had Peter arrested (Acts 12:2-3). The night before the planned trial and execution, an angel appeared in his cell, struck Peter on the side awakening him, and led him out of the city. Peter went to a home where an all-night prayer meeting was being held. The servant was so excited to see him that she forgot to open the gate. The people didn't believe her at first, but when Peter kept knocking, they finally went to the gate and let him in. After sharing the amazing angel empowered jail break, Peter departed Jerusalem and King Agrippa went to Caesarea. That is where our text for today begins.

²⁰ Now Herod was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon, and they came to him with one accord, and having persuaded Blastus, the king's chamberlain, they asked for peace, because their country depended on the king's country for food. Acts 12:20 I wonder if Agrippa left Jerusalem and went to Caesarea out of embarrassment over the escape of Peter. The last person that tried to kill Christians met the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus and became the apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:3-6). God is about to deal with this Christian killer in a different manner. Nothing can stop God from getting the message of what Jesus has done for us out to the world.

You might recall that during Jesus' ministry He journeyed to the region of Tyre and Sidon. The Gentile widow pleaded for her daughter and Jesus answered her request (Matthew 15:21-28). Tyre and Sidon are neighbors of Israel to the northwest on the Mediterranean Sea. The Galilee area has been the breadbasket of the region for thousands of years. The Valley of Megiddo is rich farmland even today. The historian Josephus reports on this same event, but only Luke tells us of the delegation from Tyre and Sidon and even the name of their advocate for the meeting, Blastus. These kinds of details impress on us the historicity of the Gospel of Luke and book of Acts.

²¹ On an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and delivered an oration to them. Acts 12:21 This took place at the amphitheater in Caesarea. I've stood in that restored theater and had the tour group sit in the stands. They could hear me speak in a normal tone of voice even with the waves in the distant background. The royal robes of Agrippa included silver thread. The theater faces west toward the ocean. If it was a morning event the sun would shine off the silver in Agrippa's robe reflected as flashes of light. The Roman educated Agrippa dazzled the thousands in the theater with his appearance and his oration.

²² And the people were shouting, "The voice of a god, and not of a man!"²³ Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down, because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last. Acts 12:22-23 On this point both Josephus and Luke agree. Agrippa was well aware of Jewish traditions and fashioned himself to be a Jew for political purposes. Jews would never let themselves be called a god. It was blasphemous. This is why Jesus was crucified, only in His case He truly is God (Matthew 26:65). Luke says it was because Agrippa did not give God the glory that he was

Commented [PW1]: Acts 12:2-3 (ESV)

² He killed James the brother of John with the sword, ³ and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of Unleavened Bread.

Commented [PW2]: Acts 9:3-6 (ESV)

³ Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. ⁴ And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" ⁵ And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. ⁶ But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do."

Commented [PW3]: Matthew 15:21-28 (ESV)

²¹ And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. ²² And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon." ²³ But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, "Send her away, for she is crying out after us." ²⁴ He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." ²⁵ But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." ²⁶ And he answered, "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." ²⁷ She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." ²⁸ Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed instantly.

Commented [PW4]: Matthew 26:65 (ESV)

⁶⁵ Then the high priest tore his robes and said, "He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need? You have now heard his blasphemy."

stricken. Josephus says it was because he did not rebuke the people for the impious remarks. It is essentially the same reason. They both agree that it was shortly after this that Agrippa was afflicted. Josephus tells us that after five excruciatingly painful days, Agrippa died. That affliction is too horrific to describe in detail.

In the preceding passage and in this one an angel struck a person. In Peter's case, the angel striking him caused him to awaken and escape from Agrippa's plan to kill him (Acts 12:7). In Agrippa's case, the angel's strike was to inflict God's justice. Angels are sent to minister to those who are heirs of salvation (Hebrews 1:14), but also to execute God's justice as we see in the case of Agrippa.

²⁴ But the word of God increased and multiplied. Acts 12:24 BUT... Man proposes but God disposes. The Word goes forward, powerful, and without equal, marching through the hearts of men and women, until the whole world hears. The word of God increases as more and more are added to the church and join the ranks of those who share the word of God with others (Acts 6:7).

Throughout the Christian era, men have tried to extinguish the Bible and put an end to the church. It's a spiritual war. There are times when the forces that oppose us seem to have the upper hand. It looks like that in our country as Bible believing people are portrayed as backward, ignorant, biased, and mean spirited. The bad examples of those who claim to be Christians are emphasized, while relief efforts and loving generosity of true Christians is mostly ignored. We should not be discouraged, for God always prevails (Matthew 5:11-12).

Nations that have tried to extinguish the Bible and the church have found that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church. ISIS tried to wipe out Christianity in the Middle East only to have more Muslims come to Christ than at any time in history. China tried to rid itself of missionaries and found the church exploded exponentially under persecution. The most uncomfortable place for a Christian is a comfortable place. The most dangerous condition for the church is prosperity, for it is then we take our eyes off the Lord and compromise our stand on the truth of the gospel (Proverbs 20:8-9).

²⁵ And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had completed their service, bringing with them John, whose other name was Mark. Acts 12:25 The chapter ends by returning to the previous account of Barnabas and Saul bringing the gifts of support from the church in Antioch to the church of Jerusalem (Acts 11:29-30). This is the turning point in Acts. The rest of the book is focused on the Apostle Paul and his missionary journeys which take the gospel to the Gentiles. The connecting point with the stories in-between is John Mark. It was his mother's house where the prayer meeting was held for Peter. He is the cousin of Barnabas (Colossians 4:10). Barnabas and Saul are bringing him back with them to help in the ministry to Antioch.

^{13:1} Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. Acts 13:1 We familiar with Barnabas and Saul, but we are introduced to a few new names. Simeon is the same name as Simon. He was called Niger which means

Commented [PW5]: Acts 12:7 (ESV)

⁷ And behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, "Get up quickly." And the chains fell off his hands.

Commented [PW6]: Hebrews 1:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?

Commented [PW7]: Acts 6:7 (ESV)

⁷ And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

Commented [PW8]: Matthew 5:11-12 (ESV)

¹¹ "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Commented [PW9]: Proverbs 30:8-9 (ESV)

⁸ Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me.

⁹ lest I be full and deny you and say, "Who is the LORD?" or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.

Commented [PW10]: Acts 11:29-30 (ESV)

²⁹ So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea.

³⁰ And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

Commented [PW11]: Colossians 4:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him),

black. It may be because he was dark skinned, or it may have been a family name used to tell him apart from another Simon, as Simon is a common name. Lucias came from North Africa. There was a large Jewish population there but he could also have been a person of color. And there was also a man of social and political standing, Manaen. He had a Jewish name and was brought up with Herod Antipas. That would place him in his sixties. This quite a mixture of cultures and backgrounds, but in Christ they are one (1 Corinthians 1:17).

Ephesians 4:11 tells us that the church has apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers. I'm of the opinion that the Greek in that verse indicates that pastors and teachers are the same calling. In the church in Antioch, we don't see the titles apostles or evangelists, though Saul will later refer to himself as an apostle (Galatians 1:1), and he and Barnabas will go out to evangelize communities.

Prophets can predict things to come (John 16:13), but the word simply implies those who share messages inspired by God for a particular people at a particular time. They can teach and preach, but the difference is that their message is anointed with a timeliness. Prophets and teachers are exactly what the young Antioch church needed. Apparently, these men were the elders (overseers) of that congregation.

² While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Acts 13:2 Here we have one of only a few examples of how the elders of the early church functioned. The elders met together to worship while fasting and seeking the Lord's guidance for the church. With a heavy heart I say that only a very small number of churches follow this example. Paul's pastoral letters to Titus and Timothy are very clear that individual churches are led by elders who meet certain godly qualifications (Titus 1:5-9; 1 Timothy 3:2-7). Most churches today are led by one man who is chosen by the congregation or staff. That puts a big target on that individual's back. If Satan can bring that one person down, the whole church suffers. That is one reason why God's plan is for equal and accountable elders. There may be a preaching elder who does most of the preaching, but all the elders are equal and hold one another accountable. If one of them is not living up to the biblical standard, the others can ask him to step down until he gets his life in order. If my fellow elders point out some compromise, I submit to them. When an elder goes home to Jesus, the group of elders carries on with the same vision and direction as they were previously led. There is unity, continuity, and stability for the church. I thank God for the elders God has provided for this church.

These men in Antioch may have had Barnabas lead them. That is referred to as "first among equals." James, Jesus' brother, was the first among equals in the Jerusalem church. He led the meetings and drew up the conclusions that were reached by all at the leading of the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:13).

In Antioch, the elders were worshipping and fasting when the Holy Spirit spoke to them. The Greek word for worshipping was used by the secular world as "to perform the duties of a public office. The Greek Old Testament, however, uses the word to describe

Commented [PW12]: 1 Corinthians 10:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

Commented [PW13]: Ephesians 4:11 (ESV)

¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers,

Commented [PW14]: Galatians 1:1 (ESV)

¹ Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—

Commented [PW15]: John 16:13 (ESV)

¹³ When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.

Commented [PW16]: Titus 1:5-9 (ESV)

⁵ This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you—

⁶ if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination.

⁷ For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain.

⁸ but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.

⁹ He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

Commented [PW17]: 1 Timothy 3:2-7 (ESV)

² Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,

³ not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.

⁴ He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive,

⁵ for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?

⁶ He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.

⁷ Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

Commented [PW18]: Acts 15:13 (ESV)

¹³ After they finished speaking, James replied, "Brothers, listen to me.

priestly service. It described the priests who ministered in the tabernacle (Exodus 28:41). Serving in a leadership role in the church must be viewed as an act of worship to God. Such service consists of offering spiritual sacrifices to Him (cf. Hebrews 13:15-16), including prayer, oversight of the flock, studying, and preaching and teaching the Word.² The passage does not tell us how the Spirit spoke. That's a good thing, or we would limit God to speaking in that one way. There are many ways God can speak to us. However, the message was undeniably clear and they acted on it.

I confess that we fall short in this area seeking God in worship and fasting. Your elders are wonderful men who love the Lord. We meet and seek God's guidance. But how we need to come together in the desperation of fasting to worship together and wait on the Holy Spirit to direct us. I'm not familiar with any church that functions like this, though there must be some out there. Imagine how healthy the church around the world would be if we followed this pattern set for us by these in Antioch! Imagine how spiritually healthy our homes would be if we would all do the same. We need to learn to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit like these men in the church of Antioch did (John 10:3-4). This need for prayer is one reason we will have the church open Monday mornings from eight o'clock and Thursday evening from 5 p.m. There is no agenda or format, just come and pray and together we will seek God. Will you please pray for the elders to learn to worship and pray together as we seek God's leading.

³ *Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.* Acts 13:3 They heard from the Lord and acted on what they heard (James 2:26). The Greek is clear in the tense of these verbs. It literally reads, "After having fasted and after having prayed and after having laid their hands on them they send them away." They would have prayed for God's direction and anointing. They would have asked God to bring fruit from their labors and to fill them with power in the Spirit to proclaim the Word (Ephesians 6:18-19). God certainly answered those prayers as we will see later.

They laid hands on them. God called them to the work and the church affirmed them being set apart for the ministry by the laying on of hands. That is how it should always be: God's call and the church's confirmation and support. They were sending off their leaders to do in other places what was done in Antioch. That would mean the other elders would have to pick up the slack. It wasn't, "Oh boy, now we get to lead!" It was more like, "Now it is our time to step up and take up the slack by serving more diligently" (1 Peter 5:1-3).

These two accounts give us a bigger picture of God's work in the earth. Herod Agrippa seemed to have all the power and was trying to use it to wipe out the apostles. One touch from an angel and it was over. By contrast, former Christian killer Saul and Mr. Encouragement Barnabas were just two seemingly insignificant men. But when God laid His hand on them to anoint them, the entire world would never be the same. Remember this: Things are rarely what they appear to be at any given moment. The love of God is going out into the ends of the earth, transforming lives, and purifying a bride for the Son! The conditions often look as if worldliness is prevailing, but if we look deeper we see it is almighty God who is prevailing and will prevail in the end.

Commented [PW19]: Exodus 28:41 (ESV)

⁴¹ And you shall put them on Aaron your brother, and on his sons with him, and shall anoint them and ordain them and consecrate them, that they may serve me as priests.

Commented [PW20]: Hebrews 13:15-16 (ESV)

¹⁵ Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.

¹⁶ Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

Commented [PW21]: MacArthur New Testament Commentary on Acts 13:2

Commented [PW22]: John 10:3-4 (ESV)

³ To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.

Commented [PW23]: James 2:26 (ESV)

²⁶ For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

Commented [PW24]: Ephesians 6:18-19 (ESV)

¹⁸ praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,

¹⁹ and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel,

Commented [PW25]: 1 Peter 5:1-3 (ESV)

¹ So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed;

² shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly;

³ not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.

Wayside has done the same work of sending over the years. Clair and Mayann were sent to Mali and continue to lead short term missions to this day. Mac and Jory spent a year in Uganda. Mac is now a Christian counselor. Vachon-Vieras were sent out to start Leap of Faith Learning to minister to families with children who have disabilities and help churches welcome them. We have sent out several short term missions. I consider Rick Burd, Jill Maynard, and Luke Thorne as our missionaries to students. And what a mission field that is today! Ray and Lynne do mission work in Ireland every summer. And there is the new way to do missions through the web. We minister to thousands every month through that medium. The world is changing and new methods are available, but the message and the mission is the same.

This move in Antioch was the final step in the expansion of the church, the missionary movement, going into all the world as Jesus commanded (Mark 16:15). Why? Because the love of God longs for every individual to come to a saving relationship in Jesus by which they are reconciled to the Father (2 Corinthians 5:20). In just eight years, portions of the gospel will be in every language around the world (Matthew 24:14). No other book comes anywhere close to as many translations. Again, we can say that it is because of the love of God that it is so. Who could have known when Saul and Barnabas were sent out just how big the world is and that it would take two thousand years to complete the mission?

You play a part in this as you give to missions through our budget. Cathy Morris will soon be going to Africa to see the new schools with a Christian influenced curriculum that we've had a small part in helping. While we participate in this great ongoing movement abroad, we can also participate in it right here. God brings the world to our city and right by our front door. Let us be praying how we can be a part of sharing God's love for the world demonstrated in His Son, Christ Jesus.

Questions

- 1 What did Agrippa try to do in the preceding passage?
- 2 Why did God send an angel to strike Agrippa?
- 3 What happened in spite of Agrippa's efforts? Why?
- 4 What conditions help the church grow? Stagnate?
- 5 How does the focus shift in this passage?
- 6 Describe the way the Antioch elders functioned?
- 7 Is this possible today?
- 8 Who called and who set apart?
- 9 How far reaching was the results of this passage?
- 10 What is our part in this today?

Commented [PW26]: Mark 16:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.

Commented [PW27]: 2 Corinthians 5:20 (ESV)

²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

Commented [PW28]: Matthew 24:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.