

ACTS: I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH (PART 15)

Acts 11 contained a moment of destiny, when the church at Antioch was born. This moment is why the Apostolics would soon be known as those who “turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6) in the first century; it is why there is a church at all in the twenty-first century. The Jerusalem church never got to send out history’s greatest missionary – that honor fell to the Antioch church because they had a missionary heart.

Acts 11:25-26 Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.

Acts 12:1-4 Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.) And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people.

“about that time” = of course there will be opposition to great progress!

“Herod” = grandson of Herod the Great who slaughtered the infants in Bethlehem, nephew of Herod Antipas who beheaded John the Baptist

JAMES is called the “brother of John” to distinguish him from the other James, who is the author of the epistle of James. He was the first of the apostles to suffer death, and his brother John was the last.

Mark 10:35-41 And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto him, saying, Master, we would that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire. And he said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you? They said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory. But Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? And they said unto him, We can. And Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized: But to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared. And when the ten heard it, they began to be much displeased with James and John.

“four quaternions” = 16 guards (this is Peter’s third time in prison)

“after Easter” = after Passover

QUESTIONS:

- Why should Stephen be stoned to death, yet Paul will be stoned to death and then miraculously raised up to continue his ministry?
- Why should Philip be supernaturally transported to witness to one soul, and yet Paul has to travel thousands of weary miles to preach?
- Why should Peter and the Apostles be delivered by angels out of prison, yet Paul be left to die in prison writing letters to the churches?
- Why should God raise Dorcas from the dead and not Stephen?
- Why should God let James be beheaded, yet the same night Peter is to be beheaded send an angel to deliver him out of that same prison?

GOD IS SOVEREIGN!

Acts 12:5-11 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 from his hands. And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision. When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him. And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews.

BUT PRAYER WAS MADE WITHOUT CEASING OF THE CHURCH UNTO GOD FOR HIM ... the setbacks the church had experienced did not stop them from praying, and this time their prayer is the turning point!

Thomas Watson (Puritan preacher): “The angel fetched Peter out of prison, but it was prayer that fetched the angel.”

Peter was SLEEPING soundly, even though he was to be executed the next day – that is having CONFIDENCE in God! He knew that the throne in Heaven was in control, not the throne on earth!

v. 11 – “delivered” = word Stephen used to describe Exodus (Acts 7:34)

Acts 12:12-19 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. And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda. And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate. And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel. But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished. But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place. Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter. And when Herod had sought for him, and found him not, he examined the keepers, and commanded that they should be put to death. And he went down from Judaea to Caesarea, and there abode.

"It is his angel" = popular superstition of the day, that a man's guardian angel sometimes assumed his form

How many times do we pray without expecting an answer?!

Acts 12:20-25 And Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon: but they came with one accord to him, and, having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, desired peace; because their country was nourished by the king's country. 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. And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost. But the word of God grew and multiplied. And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark.

Herod dared to lift his hand against the CHURCH. Now his words were stilled forever, but the WORD grew and multiplied!

Daniel 4:17 This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men.

"Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem" = Acts 11:29-30

"John, whose surname was Mark" = Barnabas' cousin

Acts 13:1-3 Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

Until now, Jerusalem had been the center of ministry, and Peter had been the key apostle. But from this point on, Antioch would become the new center, and Paul the key apostle. The Gospel was on the move! The Antioch Church sends out history's first missionaries in Acts 13-14. In these two chapters, Luke describes Paul's ministry in several cities.

Acts 13:4-12 So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus. And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to their minister. And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Barjesus: Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; 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) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith. Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him, And said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt 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. Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.

Acts 4:36 And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus,

Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

Acts 13:9 is the first place we find the name PAUL in the New Testament. As a Roman citizen, the apostle's full name was probably "Saul Paulus," for many Jews had both Jewish and Roman names.

Acts 13:13 Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem.

"Barnabas and Saul" now becomes "Paul and his company" ... Barnabas has the spirit of John the Baptist ... "he must increase, I must decrease."