

Acts 12:11-17 Peter finally came to his senses. ¹² "It's really true!" he said. "The Lord has sent his angel and saved me from Herod and from what the Jewish leaders had planned to do to me!"

When he realized this, he went to the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where many were gathered for prayer. ¹³ He knocked at the door in the gate, and a servant girl named Rhoda came to open it. ¹⁴ When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed that, instead of opening the door, she ran back inside and told everyone, "Peter is standing at the door!"

¹⁵ "You're out of your mind!" they said. When she insisted, they decided, "It must be his angel." *

¹⁶ Meanwhile, Peter continued knocking. When they finally opened the door and saw him, they were amazed. ¹⁷ He motioned for them to quiet down and told them how the Lord had led him out of prison. "Tell James [half brother of Jesus] and the other [Christian] brothers what happened," he said. And then he went to another place.

* They apparently believed that the angel assigned to a believer was capable of representing him.

9. Discussion: (a) Why do you think those who were praying for Peter's deliverance were so doubtful that God had actually answered their prayers? (b) Can you tell about a time when you prayed for something that seemed too unlikely, even for God to answer? (c) Why do you think, after telling his story, Peter did not stay with the believers who had prayed for him? [Clue: Who would likely be hunting for Peter?]

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An Interactive Life Application Bible Study of the Acts of the Apostles for Small Groups

Key: Blue = New Testament Red = Words of Jesus
Green = Old Testament Quotes

Lesson 16

1. Background: In lesson 15 we studied how God led Peter to present the message of eternal life through Jesus to a Roman military officer with his household and friends. As a result, strong religious and cultural barriers between Jews and Gentiles began to break down. In this lesson we see how God used persecution against the Jewish followers of Jesus to help spread the Gospel into other Gentile areas.

2. Jews and Gentiles form the first church of its kind.

Acts 11:19-26 Meanwhile, the believers who had been scattered during the persecution after Stephen's death traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch of Syria. They preached the word of God, but only to Jews. ²⁰ However, some of the believers who went to Antioch from Cyprus and Cyrene began preaching to the Gentiles about the Lord Jesus. ²¹ The power of the Lord was with them, and a large number of these Gentiles believed and turned to the Lord.

²² When the church at Jerusalem heard what had happened, they sent Barnabas to Antioch. ²³ When he arrived and saw this evidence of God's blessing, he was filled with joy, and he encouraged the believers to stay true to the Lord. ²⁴ Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and strong in faith. And many people were brought to the Lord.

²⁵ Then Barnabas went on to Tarsus to look for Saul. ²⁶ When he found him, he brought him back to Antioch. Both of them stayed there with the church for a full year, teaching large crowds of people. (It was at Antioch that the believers were first called Christians.)

3. Discussion: (a) Try to identify the locations of the

places mentioned in Acts 11:19. (b) What is the evidence that God approved of those who began preaching to the Gentiles. (c) What spiritual gifts did Barnabas appear to have that made him a good man to send into a new ministry? (d) Why do you think Barnabas thought it was a good idea to bring Saul to Antioch? [Note: Why do you think Antioch was the first place where believers were called *Christians* ("Little Christs" in Greek)?

4. The first Christian famine relief is carried out.

Acts 11:27-30 During this time some prophets traveled from Jerusalem to Antioch. ²⁸ One of them named Agabus stood up in one of the meetings and predicted by the Spirit that a great famine was coming upon the entire Roman world. (This was fulfilled during the reign of Claudius.) ²⁹ So the believers in Antioch decided to send relief to the brothers and sisters in Judea, everyone giving as much as they could. ³⁰ This they did, entrusting their gifts to Barnabas and Saul to take to the elders of the church in Jerusalem.

5. Discussion: (a) What is the proof that Agabus had a genuine gift of prophecy? (b) What is especially interesting about the fact that new believers in Antioch of Syria were sending relief to the Jewish "Followers of the Way?"

6. James Is Killed and Peter Is Imprisoned. (Acts 12)

Acts 12:1-5 About that time King Herod Agrippa began to persecute some believers in the church. ² He had the apostle James (John's brother) killed with a sword. ³ When Herod saw how much this pleased the Jewish people, he also arrested Peter. (This took place during the Passover celebration.) ⁴ Then he imprisoned him, placing him under the guard of four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring Peter out for public trial after the

Passover. ⁵ But while Peter was in prison, the church prayed very earnestly for him.

7. Background: King Herod Agrippa was appointed by the Romans. He was a grandson of Herod the Great, who met the wise men and later killed the babies in Bethlehem.

8. Discussion: (a) What do you think Herod Agrippa intended to accomplish by putting Peter on trial? (b) What place does prayer have in times of great emergency? (c) Why do you think God allowed James to be killed and spared Peter?

9. Peter's Miraculous Escape from Prison.

Acts 12:6-10 The night before Peter was to be placed on trial, he was asleep, fastened with two chains between two soldiers. Others stood guard at the prison gate. ⁷ Suddenly, there was a bright light in the cell, and an angel of the Lord stood before Peter. The angel struck him on the side to awaken him and said, "Quick! Get up!" And the chains fell off his wrists. ⁸ Then the angel told him, "Get dressed and put on your sandals." And he did. "Now put on your coat and follow me," the angel ordered.

⁹ So Peter left the cell, following the angel. But all the time he thought it was a vision. He didn't realize it was actually happening. ¹⁰ They passed the first and second guard posts and came to the iron gate leading to the city, and this opened for them all by itself. So they passed through and started walking down the street, and then the angel suddenly left him.

10. Discussion: (a) Name all the things the angel did that show some of the powers angels have. (b) What was Peter's part in this story? (c) When God answers prayer, do you think we also have a part to play in completing the miracle? Explain.