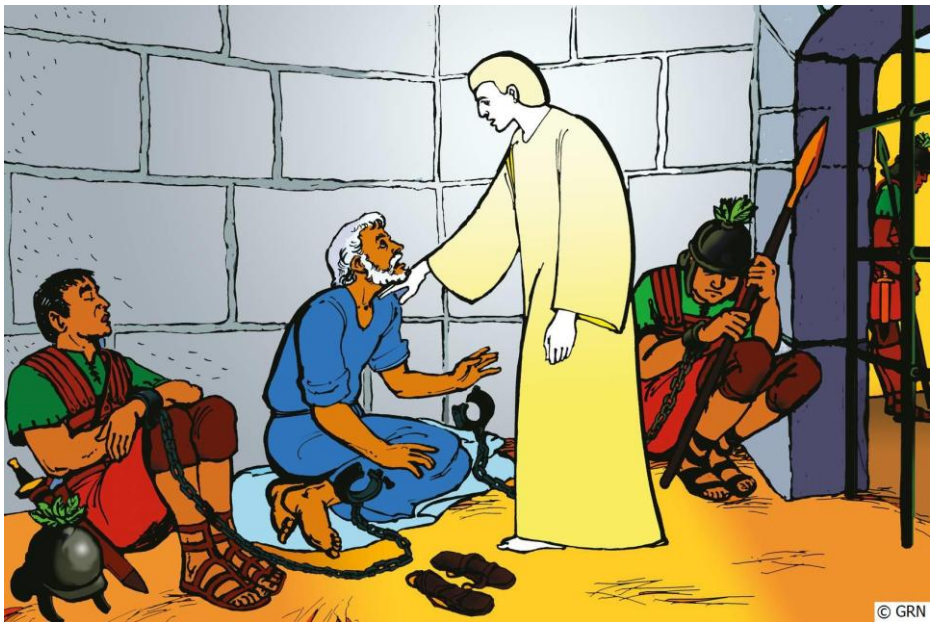
The Early Church of Jesus Christ

A Bible teaching commentary
on the Acts of the Apostles
in easy-to-read English
Written by Fred Morris



An angel visits Peter in prison in Jerusalem

Acts Unit 6 of 12

Chapters 11:19-12:25

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Unit 6: Chapters 11:19 to 12:25.

How the Early Christians spread the Good News.

At this time other believers travelled through the Roman Empire. At first, they preached the Good News of Jesus Christ to the Jews (11:19). Then some of them preached to other nations (11:20).

Believers from other lands came to live in Antioch in Syria. Antioch was the third largest city in the Roman Empire. It was here that the believers were called Christians for the first time (11:26). God was with them and many people believed and accepted Jesus as their Saviour (11:21).

The church leaders in Jerusalem heard of this. They sent Barnabas to Antioch to meet the new Christians. Through him, many more believed in Jesus and were saved from their sins (11:24). Barnabas then went to Tarsus to bring Saul back to Antioch to help him (11:25 to 26). It is still important today for new believers to understand their new faith. They do this:

- by listening to good teachers;
- by reading the whole Bible;
- by obeying the teachings of Jesus.

Agabus, a prophet from Jerusalem, also came to Antioch. The Holy Spirit spoke through him and told

him that there would be very little food in the Roman Empire. This happened around 41to 54 AD. The church in Antioch wanted to help the people in need, especially the believers in Judea. So the Christians gave money to Barnabas and Saul to take as a gift to the church in Jerusalem. (11:29 to 30).

The church in Antioch became an important centre for teaching, evangelism and aid.

ACTS CHAPTER 12.

An Angel helps Peter to escape from Prison.

The Romans put Herod Agrippa in charge of Judea. He was a grandson of Herod the Great, who killed the baby boys in Bethlehem after the birth of Jesus (Matt 2:16).

Herod Agrippa was a friend of the Jews but he was not a friend of the Christians. He put some Christians in jail and then killed James the brother of John (12:2). The Jewish leaders were pleased about this, so Herod took Peter and put him in prison. He wanted to bring Peter to trial after the Jewish Passover (12:4).

But God was in control. Later, He allowed James to be killed for his faith but chose to save Peter. Herod could not do anything to Peter unless God allowed it. God's power was greater than Herod's power (1 John

4:4). When believers are persecuted, some die early and some are saved. God is always in control. No plan of God can be defeated (Job 42:2).

In prison, Peter was chained to two soldiers. On the night before his trial, when Peter was asleep, suddenly a light shone in his cell. An angel woke him and said, "Quick, get up! Put on your clothes and follow me" (12:8).

At once Peter's chains fell off and he followed the angel. They walked past the guards and went out through the gate into the city. Peter did not know what was happening until the angel left him. Then he knew it

The friends of Peter are surprised to see him free from prison

was not a dream. He went to Mary's house where all the Christians were praying urgently for him (12:12). Mary's son John Mark was also there.

At first they could not believe that Peter was there and that their prayers had been answered (12:13 to 16). They laughed at the servant girl who found Peter standing outside the locked door. They asked for a miracle from God but did not believe the answer!

"Tell James the brother of Jesus and the Christian brothers and sisters about this", Peter said. Then he left them for a secret place (12:17).

Under Roman law, guards who let prisoners escape were killed. Peter had escaped and Herod was humiliated so he left Jerusalem for other areas on a state visit. He sat on his throne and spoke to a large crowd of people. He was dressed in royal robes (12:21).

"This is the voice of a god, not a man", the crowd shouted. Then an angel of the Lord killed Herod because he did not praise God Almighty (12:22 to 23).

After that time, the Good News of Jesus Christ spread to many places (12:24). So the prayers for Peter were answered in an amazing way. Also, Barnabas and Saul moved freely between Jerusalem and Antioch. John Mark went with them (12:25).

Conclusions.

The book of The Acts of the Apostles has often been called 'The Acts of the Holy Spirit'. Luke wrote it so that people would know about the great works of God and the power of His Spirit at work through the apostles after the first Pentecost.

In the early days of the Christian Church, the believers shared the Good News of Jesus Christ through the countries of the Middle East. Then Philip told the Good News to the Ethiopian, who took it to Africa. History books tell us that Mark took the Good News to Egypt and Thomas took it to India so that it spread there. Saul (who was later called Paul) took the Good News to Europe.

In the early days of the church, the Christians were persecuted at times but they were bold, loving and caring. They did not fight when there was trouble. Many moved away. Wherever they went, they spoke about the risen Lord Jesus, through the power of His Spirit.

They met Jews who believed in the true God, but who did not know that Jesus was the Son of God. Many of the Jews turned to Jesus. At this time, the believers were first called Christians. God's Holy Spirit worked in their lives. They were saved by God's grace through repentance and faith in Jesus.

We have also read about the three well-known people who were converted to follow Jesus at this time:

The man from Ethiopia who believed in God and wanted to understand more about Jesus Christ, the Messiah, written in the Jewish Old Testament.

Saul, who believed in God but had not understood that Jesus was their promised Messiah.

The centurion who believed in God and worshipped Him but had not heard about Jesus.

God loved these men, and so the Holy Spirit led Philip, a believer in Damascus, and Peter to them. When they heard and understood the message about Jesus, they believed in Him and were saved.

In the same way, God wants us to tell others about Jesus. Do you know anyone who believes in God, but does not know how to be saved? Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you, so that you can tell them about Jesus.

We all have a part to play in God's plan to save the world. In every age or generation many have never heard the Good News about Jesus Christ. Jesus taught that each new generation must be 'born again' (John 3:3). Therefore, in every age, Christians must carry on the work of telling the world about Jesus to young and old. If we have put our faith in Jesus and have been born again, God wants us to tell others the Good News.

We can be led and guided by the Holy Spirit, just as Paul was in the first days of the early church.

Today, over two billion people in the world call themselves 'Christian'. Every year there are millions of new believers. When they are 'born again' by hearing and believing and applying the teachings of Jesus, they need to learn more about the life and writings of believers in the early church. They need to understand what truth is and what error is. We encourage you to read your Bible daily. Manna Bible teaching commentaries will help you to understand the Bible and help you to share God's truth with others.

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