

**1179 Gospel to Gentiles, angel rescues Peter, and Herod's death - Acts(11)1–(12)19  
(by Whirlwind)**

**First, the text explains why Peter told the congregation about baptizing Gentiles like Cornelius. Second, we discussed the beginning of the Gospel's widespread proclamation among the Gentiles. Third, we examined Barnabas' search for Saul and the person Agabus, observing how Paul truly disregarded his own life, standing with God in his decisions. Fourth, we addressed King Herod's killing of James and Peter's imprisonment. Fifth, we observed how an angel rescued Peter from prison and explored how the Triune God's perspective on death differs profoundly from human's. Finally, we examined that Herod punished by God and eaten by worms.**

**Please note: This article is based on the Sunday (2/15/26) topicwise Bible study. Unless otherwise specified, verses refer to those in NASB95. Past articles referenced can be found on our website, <https://a-christian-voice.com/>, under 'On spiritual understanding about life.'**

**1. Peter explains why he baptized Gentiles like Cornelius**

**"Now the apostles and the brethren who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those who were circumcised took issue with him, saying, "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them." But Peter began speaking and proceeded to explain to them in orderly sequence, saying, "I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, an object coming down like a great sheet lowered by four corners from the sky; and it came right down to me, and when I had fixed my gaze on it and was observing it I saw the four-footed animals of the earth and the wild beasts and the crawling creatures and the birds of the air. I also heard a voice saying to me, 'Get up, Peter; kill and eat.' But I said, 'By no means, Lord, for nothing unholy or unclean has ever entered my mouth.' But a voice from heaven answered a second time, 'What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy.' This happened three times, and everything was drawn back up into the sky. And behold, at that moment three men appeared at the house in which we were staying, having been sent to me from Caesarea. The Spirit told me to go with them without misgivings. These six brethren also went with me and we entered the man's house. And he reported to us how he had seen the angel standing in his house, and saying, 'Send to Joppa and have Simon, who is also called Peter, brought here; and he will speak words to you by which you will be saved, you and all your household.' And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as He did upon us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' Therefore if God gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?" When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, "Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life.""(Acts 11:1-18)**

**We have already discussed in detail in chapter 10, "1178 God baptizes Cornelius and others with Holy Spirit and water – Acts(10)1-48", the matter of Peter and the Gentile Cornelius. Since these verses and chapter 10 are based on the same facts, we must take their union—that is, we must reconcile the narratives in both places. What we see here is Peter saying, "And I**

remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' Therefore if God gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?"(Acts 11:16-17) When they heard this, they had nothing more to say. Instead, they praised God, saying, "...Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life."(Acts 11:18)

As we mentioned before, Christians can only understand how God works in their lives by looking back—this is a prime example of such reflection. Additionally, I need to correct a mistake from last week: it should be: "I was ...in a trance I saw a vision, an object coming down like a great sheet lowered by four corners from the sky; and it came right down to me, and when I had fixed my gaze on it and was observing it I saw the four-footed animals of the earth and the wild beasts and the crawling creatures and the birds of the air."(Acts 11:6) Here, clean and unclean animals were mixed together, not just unclean ones. I won't elaborate on other similar points.

## **2. The beginning of the Gospel's spread among the Gentiles**

"So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord. The news about them reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch. Then when he arrived and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord; for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord."(Acts 11:19-24)

As we mentioned earlier, persecution may seem like a bad thing to human eyes, yet it actually led to the spread of the gospel. God's ways are truly wonderful and surpass our imagination. These scattered disciples primarily preached to the Jews, "But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus."(Acts 11:20) Here we see another example of "what God tells us through Bible is consistent." Why?

At the first Pentecost after the Lord's resurrection, the Holy Spirit descended. The text states: "And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language."(Acts 2:6) It then lists in detail the people present, including "Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes."(Acts 2:10) Next comes Peter's sermon: "Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?'"(Acts 2:37) "So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls."(Acts 2:41) Therefore, the approximately three thousand people must include those

listed; otherwise, the Scriptures would not have needed to detail each group but could have simply mentioned them in passing. This passage confirms that Cyrenians believed in the Lord. Before the incident with Cornelius, this was the only occasion when Gentiles had the opportunity to hear the gospel. Cornelius's story merely formally opened the door for preaching the gospel to the Gentiles. We know that both men of Cyprus and Cyrene were Gentiles, which explains why, upon arriving in Antioch, they also preached about the Lord Jesus to the Gentile Greeks.

The church in Jerusalem, observing the Lord's work, sent Barnabas to Antioch to encourage the believers. Barnabas remained there. As Scripture records: "And he left for Tarsus to look for Saul; and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch."(Acts 11:25-26) Thus the disciples were called Christians for the first time, not by the church in Jerusalem.

We are truly glad it was arranged this way, for it shows us Gentiles that we absolutely have the opportunity to be conformed to the image of Jesus (cf. Romans 8:29). We see that in the Jerusalem church at that time, indeed, some were not conformed to Jesus' image—they thought that circumcision necessary. Therefore, after this, the first Jerusalem Council would be held (see Acts 15:1-29).

The same holds true today, as few Israelites have come to faith. This is why Paul declared, "For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved; ..." (Romans 11:25-26)

The Scriptures also make it clear that through the Lord's work, there were already believers who had come to faith. But when Barnabas, filled with the Holy Spirit, joined them, many more came to the Lord. Therefore, do not underestimate the influence of a person who lives life as an example.

### **3. Barnabas seeks Saul, and the man Agabus**

"And he left for Tarsus to look for Saul; and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them named Agabus stood up and began to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the reign of Claudius. And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea. And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders."(Acts 11:25-30)

Barnabas was "Son of Encouragement", so he sought out Saul. The people trusted them and entrusted the offerings to them to deliver to the elders in Jerusalem. Here we must mention Agabus, the prophet with the gift of prophecy. This man is mentioned only twice in the New

Testament, the other instance being in this passage: "As we were staying there (Philip's home) for some days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, "This is what the Holy Spirit says: 'In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'""(Acts 21:10-11) Note that Agabus only told Paul what the Holy Spirit said would happen; he did not say the Holy Spirit didn't wanted Paul to go to Jerusalem. Paul decided to go anyway, so it cannot be said he was disobedient to God.

Let us examine how he made his decision. Previously, when I read this passage: "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake."(Philippians 1:21-24) I used to think he was torn between the two because he feared death. Now I truly understand that finishing his course and fulfilling the ministry he received from the Lord Jesus was more important. This is what Paul said, "And now, behold, bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God."(Acts 20:22-24) We see that he truly did not regard his life as precious, standing on God's side in his decisions. To stand forever on God's side is also what we ought to do.

#### 4. King Herod kills James and imprisons Peter

"Now about that time Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church in order to mistreat them. And he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword. When he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. Now it was during the days of Unleavened Bread. When he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out before the people. So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God. On the very night when Herod was about to bring him forward, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and guards in front of the door were watching over the prison."(Acts 12:1-6)

Here we see Herod killing James and imprisoning Peter. The text clearly describes Peter's plight—under strict guard and facing imminent execution—yet "...prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God."(Acts 12:5) hoping God would rescue him. God did indeed save him in an unexpected miraculous way, and we will now see how God rescued him.

#### 5. An angel rescues Peter from prison

"And behold, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared and a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter's side and woke him up, saying, "Get up quickly." And his chains fell off his

hands. And the angel said to him, "Gird yourself and put on your sandals." And he did so. And he said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me." And he went out and continued to follow, and he did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. When they had passed the first and second guard, they came to the iron gate that leads into the city, which opened for them by itself; and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel departed from him. When Peter came to himself, he said, "Now I know for sure that the Lord has sent forth His angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting." And when he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. When he knocked at the door of the gate, a servant-girl named Rhoda came to answer. When she recognized Peter's voice, because of her joy she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter was standing in front of the gate. They said to her, "You are out of your mind!" But she kept insisting that it was so. They kept saying, "It is his angel." But Peter continued knocking; and when they had opened the door, they saw him and were amazed. But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had led him out of the prison. And he said, "Report these things to James and the brethren." Then he left and went to another place. Now when day came, there was no small disturbance among the soldiers as to what could have become of Peter. When Herod had searched for him and had not found him, he examined the guards and ordered that they be led away to execution. Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and was spending time there."(Acts 12:7-19)

The angel's appearance was accompanied by light. The scripture clearly describes how the Lord rescued Peter—through supernatural means. We see that when God deems it necessary, He actively intervenes. We also observe that while the church earnestly prayed to God for him, they scarcely dared to believe God would deliver him in such a manner. Finally, we witness Herod's reaction—the indiscriminate slaughter of the innocent. Please read the passage for yourselves; we shall not dwell on it further.

We have said that God views death very differently from humans. In the same incident involving Herod, He allowed James to be martyred while saving Peter. This signifies that He had the power to save James but chose not to, making him the first young apostle to be martyred. This shows James had completed his earthly journey, for in heaven he is like what "...Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."(Matthew 19:28) Moreover, in the New Jerusalem, "And the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb."(Revelation 21:14) His name is written above. Thus, we see that the Triune God views death very differently from humans.

## **6. Herod punished by God and eaten by worms**

"Now he was very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; and with one accord they came to him, and having won over Blastus the king's chamberlain, they were asking for peace, because their country was fed by the king's country. On an appointed day Herod, having put on his

royal apparel, took his seat on the rostrum and began delivering an address to them. The people kept crying out, "The voice of a god and not of a man!" And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and died. But the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied. And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission, taking along with them John, who was also called Mark."(Acts 12:20-25)

This is the second mention in the Book of Acts about John, called Mark, whom Barnabas and Saul brought back from Jerusalem after completing their mission. The Gospel of Mark was written by this Mark. When Peter said, "...so does my son, Mark."(1 Peter 5:13), he was also referring to this Mark. We will speak more about him later; we will not elaborate further here.

This passage describes Herod's punishment by God and his death by being eaten by worms. Some might say, "Wasn't it petty of the Lord to send an angel to punish Herod immediately just because he failed to give glory to God?" No, God is a God of mercy and grace. In the Old Testament, "After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great." ..Then in the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete."(Genesis 15:1-16) God gave the Amorites over four hundred years, yet they did not repent. How hardened the human heart can be! Only after their iniquity was complete did the Israelites enter the land of Canaan.

In the New Testament, "...God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."(1 Timothy 2:4) We know that "“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."(John 3:16-18) In His plan of salvation, He has given every person an opportunity to be saved.

From the Scriptures, we see that the Gentiles of Tyre and Sidon came with one accord to seek peace. They were truly skilled in speech, even going so far as to falsely claim that Herod's words were the voice of God. This point can be seen from "what God tells through Bible is consistent," for Gentiles at that time could not possibly discern God's voice. Sometimes even Jews might not hear it—as when Paul was struck by the light: "And those who were with me saw the light, to be sure, but did not understand the voice of the One who was speaking to me."(Acts 22:9)

If I recall correctly, the New Testament records only two instances of immediate death. The other occurred because of deceiving the Holy Spirit (see Acts 5:1-10). This time, it was not because God was petty and sent an angel to punish him instantly, but because he had committed too many evil deeds—such as the indiscriminate slaughter of innocents mentioned earlier—and with this final act, his iniquity was complete. When God acted, he was devoured by worms.