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Acts 12:1 - 12:25



Acts - Steve Gregg

In "Acts 12:1-25," Steve Gregg explores the narrative of James, the apostle who was martyred by King Herod Agrippa. Unlike Judas, James was not replaced as an apostle, challenging the concept of apostolic succession. Peter is imprisoned during festival season and is miraculously freed by an angel, and ultimately escapes Jerusalem to an unknown location. The chapter ends with the introduction of John Mark, who will play a significant role in later chapters of Acts.

Transcript

Okay, let's turn to Acts chapter 12. In this section of Acts, Luke has been bouncing back and forth between Paul and Peter, originally simply mentioning Paul in his conversion and his early Christian life in chapter 9, then going back to Peter and several incidents in his life. Then after that, it goes back to Paul and how that Barnabas found him in Tarsus and brought him to Antioch.

And so Paul and Barnabas, or Saul, Paul was still being called Saul at this point. He had both names. By the way, I should clarify this.

People sometimes say, well, his name was Saul until he got converted, then he was called Paul. That's not really true. His name was Saul and Paul from his birth.

Paul was his Roman name given to him at birth because his father was a Roman citizen, and he would be given a Roman name at birth. But because he operated in his early life among Jewish people, he went by his Jewish name, Saul. It's only a coincidence that the two names sound similar.

They weren't picked to be his two names because they sounded similar. Saul is a Hebrew name that means asked for, and he was named after King Saul, of course, in the Old Testament. Paul is a very common Latin name.

It means small. And he happened to have both names from birth. But in his early life, since he was not associated with Gentiles, he went entirely by Saul, his Jewish name.

And he's still going by Saul at this point in the book of Acts. It's not until chapter 13 when he and Barnabas are sent out as missionaries to the Gentile world that he begins to call himself Paul, or at least Luke begins to call him Paul. If you look at chapter 13, verse 9, it says, Then Saul, who also is called Paul, spoke.

And then from then on, he's always called Paul. So the transition from calling him Saul to calling him Paul is right there. In Acts 13 and verse 9. It's also the case that this story of him calling himself Paul happened while he and Barnabas were evangelizing a Roman authority whose name was Paul.

Sergius Paulus would be Sergius Paul. And so maybe because he was ministering to this official named Paul, he got the idea of calling himself Paul too, to relate with the guy. But actually, that doesn't seem very likely.

It just seems likely that it's because he's in the Gentile world. He's now using his Gentile name, his Roman name. But he and Barnabas, in the last of chapter 11, go to Jerusalem from Antioch to bring a gift because of a famine that is anticipated.

Which was anticipated because a prophet named Agabus had predicted there would be this famine. So Saul and Barnabas take this offering, which the church in Antioch took for the poor saints in Jerusalem, and takes it to them. And we don't read of them again until the end of chapter 12.

Between their arrival in Jerusalem and their leaving Jerusalem, we have this story inserted. Now, whether it happened chronologically at this point or not, we can't be sure. Because Luke isn't always slicing this that way.

He's given a period of time for Peter and a period of time for Paul. Sometimes they overlap. But the reason I don't know that the story in chapter 12 occurred while Paul and Barnabas were in Jerusalem is because it was a pretty rough time in Jerusalem at this time.

We find that Herod started persecuting the church and even killed and tried to kill. He killed James and tried to kill Peter. And so this was a very dangerous time for the church in Jerusalem.

I don't know if Saul and Barnabas were there at that time or not. Or if Luke is simply broken away from the narrative about Barnabas and Saul in order to tell one more account about Peter's life, which may or may not have happened at this same time. It says, Now, about that time, Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some of the church, and he killed James, the brother of John, with the sword.

And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. Now, it was during the days of unleavened bread. So when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison and delivered him to four squads of soldiers to keep him, intending to

bring him before the people after Passover.

Now, days of unleavened bread are the seven days that followed the Passover celebration. And the whole festival, the whole week long, was sometimes called Passover. We're told this happened during the days of unleavened bread in verse three, which means the day of the Passover had passed and they were now in the unleavened bread portion of the week.

But it's also in verse four at the last, it refers to the whole week as Passover, after Passover is done, after the whole week festivities are done. So Peter is kept in prison at this point. Herod, in this case, is Herod Agrippa I. There will be another Herod Agrippa in the book of Acts later on.

In chapter 26, Paul will give his testimony before another Herod Agrippa, who is the son of this Herod Agrippa. This Herod was the grandson of Herod the Great. Herod the Great was the founder of the Herod dynasty.

He had been appointed as the ruler of Judea about 40 years BC. But he had to fight for several years to, he had to fight the Jews, his own subjects, to allow him to come in and rule them because he was not Jewish. He was part Jewish.

Herod was a Edomite, part Edomite, part Jewish. His sons, however, apparently were more Jewish than he was because they married Jewish women and he married Jewish women. And so more Jewish blood came into the family in the later generations.

And Herod I, the grandson of Herod the Great, was interested in pleasing the Jews. Herod II, Herod Agrippa II, whom Paul addressed in chapter 26, he was almost entirely Jewish. And very interested in Jewish matters and Jewish law.

So we've got a guy who's descended from Herod the Great, kind of the pagan ruler. Herod the Great is the one who killed all the infants in Bethlehem. Herod the Great is the one who died while Jesus was in Egypt as a baby.

But his sons, some of his sons, reigned after him. Herod Antipas had ruled in Galilee after Herod the Great. Herod Philip in some of the regions up northeast of Israel.

There were several sons of Herod that divided his territory. Herod Archelaus had ruled in Judea briefly after the death of his father. But this was now a grandson of Herod.

And he was favorable with the Jews. And he saw that the Jews didn't like the apostles, so he decided to persecute the church. Because this put him in good with the Jews.

Historically, he's known to have been particularly, he always tried to curry the favor of the Pharisees in particular. Most of the persecution of the Christians in Jerusalem up to this point has been from Sadducees. Who objected to the preaching of the resurrection.

But the Pharisees also, I suppose, must have found the apostles a nuisance. For the most part. So Herod, it says he killed James with the sword.

Well, that's passed over really quickly without much detail. However, Eusebius, the church historian, tells us a little about it in his book, Ecclesiastical History. This is written about 325 A.D. It's the earliest church history we have besides the Book of Acts.

So Luke probably wrote around 62 A.D. And then about 250 years later, Eusebius wrote a history of the church, which is very valuable. And of course, some of what Eusebius tells us about the centuries before his own time, he got by tradition passed down from the church. And probably reliable tradition.

After all, only a couple centuries time, these stories probably had not changed much, especially with people who were intent on preserving the information. So we have something about the death of James. Now, this James, there's many Jameses in the Bible.

This James is the son of Zebedee, the brother of John. Remember the two fishermen who were with Peter and Andrew when they were called from their fishing nets. James and John, his brother, and Peter were regarded in the Gospel time, when Jesus was around, as the inner circle of Jesus.

These three guys were the ones who went up on the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus, while the other disciples stayed at the bottom of the hill. These are the three that went into the room with Jairus' daughter and Jesus, and the parents of the other apostles were left outside. These are the same three who were allowed to go into the interior of the Garden of Gethsemane to pray with Jesus the night of his betrayal, though the other nine apostles were left at the gate.

These three, Peter, James, and John, had very special closeness to Jesus. And it was James and John, the two brothers who asked Jesus through their mother, could they sit at Jesus' right hand and left hand when he comes into his kingdom? That is in the two places of honor. And Jesus said, well, it's not mine to give.

He says, can you drink of the cup I'm going to drink of? And can you be baptized with the baptism I'm going to be baptized with? And they, having no idea what he was talking about, said, yeah, we can do that. And he said, well, you surely will be baptized with the baptism that I'm baptized with and drink of the cup that I shall drink. But as far as sitting at my right and my left hand, he says, that's not really my prerogative.

That's the Father's. He'll give it to whoever he wants to. Now, he did predict that James and John would die and suffer persecution, as Jesus would.

And this is the fulfillment of when it happened to James. John, according to tradition, lived many decades longer and may not have died as a martyr at all, although he faced martyrdom. According to tradition, John, as an old man, was sentenced to be dipped in

boiling oil, which for most people would mean martyrdom, would die.

But he was supernaturally preserved through that. And so he is exiled to Patmos. And that is, of course, where he wrote the book of Revelation.

And according to church tradition, John didn't die as a martyr. But after he was released from Patmos, went back to Ephesus and spent his final years and died an old man in the church of Ephesus. James, his brother, however, interestingly, was the first apostle to be martyred and to fulfill the prophecy Jesus made about drinking that cup.

Interesting that these two brothers, John lived longer than any of the apostles and James lived shorter than any of the others for some reason. We don't know the ways of God and why he does these things because we find that Peter is also arrested, but he doesn't get martyred at this time. Why God spares Peter and doesn't spare James is one of those things that I'm sure the church, especially relatives of James, were wondering.

Wonder why Jesus didn't spare him. In any case, Peter also died a martyr later on. So we're all going to die.

And it's just a matter of how God chooses for us to die for his glory. In the last verses of the Gospel of John, John speaks of how Jesus, after his resurrection, was talking privately to Peter about how Peter would die. And the way John puts it is that he spoke this concerning the method by which Peter would glorify God.

In his death. And of course, that's the whole thing. It's not a question of whether we live long or live short.

The question is whether God is glorified in our death. You only get to die once. The most important thing is that however or whenever you die, it's for the glory of God.

And that was so with James. And we have this tradition about James' death that Eusebius preserves. He says, of this James, Clement adds.

Now this, I believe, would be Clement of Rome. There were two Clements. There was Clement of Rome and Clement of Alexandria.

I believe he's referring to Clement of Rome here. He says, of this James, Clement adds a narrative worthy of note in the seventh book of his institutions, evidently recording it according to the tradition which he had received from his ancestors. He says that the man who led him to the judgment seat, seeing him bearing his testimony to the faith, and moved by the fact, confessed himself a Christian.

Both, therefore, says he, were led away to die. On their way, he entreated James to be forgiven of him, and James, considering a little, replied, Peace be to thee, and kissed him. And then both were beheaded at the same time.

Now, what he's saying is that when a man was brought before court, there had to be accusers. And no doubt this man that is referred to, who was beheaded alongside James, was the accuser who had falsely brought charges against James. And then when he saw James' peacefulness and his resignation to dying for the Lord, he was so impressed that the false accuser repented and apologized to James, and confessed Christ, and was killed at the same time with James.

So, it wasn't just James that was beheaded with the sword at this point, but also the man who had accused him, according to the earliest traditions from the fathers. But, apart from that little traditional narrative from Eusebius, we have very little about James' death. And it is passed over without very much remark in chapter 12, verse 2 of Acts.

Now, it's interesting that when Judas died, it left a vacancy in the apostolate, because there were now only 11 apostles, and so the apostles in chapter 1 decided they should choose somebody to replace Judas. And so they chose Matthias to replace Judas. Roman Catholics believe that this shows there is a principle of apostolic succession.

It is the official belief of the Roman Catholic Church that the apostles, each before they died, named a successor, or at least there was one named after they died, who became their replacement. And then when that generation of leaders died, another person would replace each of them. And so through the ages.

And that's why they get the idea that the Pope is so important, that they believe Peter was the first bishop of Rome, which is nowhere stated in Scripture, nor even likely to be true. But they believe Peter was the first bishop of Rome, and then when he died, another bishop of Rome succeeded him, then another, then another, then another. And ever since the time of Peter, every bishop of Rome has sat on the seat that Peter sat on, and therefore has his authority.

They also believe that the College of Bishops is made up of the bishops that succeeded the apostles. And therefore, if you say, well, where do you get this idea of apostolic succession? Because we who are not Roman Catholics probably think, I do, I think that there were no successors to the apostles. I mean, it is true Eusebius talks about people who succeeded them in leadership, but not in apostleship.

It's true that if these apostles, you know, were leading churches somewhere, then when they died, someone else led the church and someone else after that. But it doesn't mean that the person who replaced them was an apostle like they were. Jesus had specifically named the apostles to be unique leaders of the church.

And there's no reason to believe that they had an office that people could succeed them to and be apostles like them. But it is the replacement of Judas in Acts chapter 1 that the Roman Catholics point to. They see Judas was gone, they had to replace him.

But notice when James dies, they don't replace him. Now there's only 11 living apostles and one in heaven. Now, as we sit here thousands of years later, there are 12 apostles in heaven.

They're all in heaven now, but there's still the 12 apostles. There are not successors. There are not people on earth who are the successors, you know, through the ages of each of the 12 apostles.

At least the Bible doesn't say there would be. Judas was replaced because he apostatized, because he left the faith. He left the kingdom of God entirely.

James did not. An apostle who dies faithful remains an apostle. And when in Revelation chapter 21, John sees the new Jerusalem, he sees it has 12 foundation stones and each has the name of one of the 12 apostles on it.

And then we have to assume that's the original apostles. So I believe throughout eternity, they remain the foundation of what God has done, what God has built the church. They have no actual replacements who hold the office they held.

So James, he's dispatched with a brief notice and no suggestion that the church ever thought, well, now we only have 11. We better get another guy in here. There's no successor to James.

And then Peter is arrested as we see. And because it's the festival season, Herod decides he's not going to kill him right away. He'll just keep him in prison until after the Passover season.

And then he'll bring him out and kill him. Now it says in verse 4, they delivered him over to four squads. This word squads means tetrads, which means four soldiers each.

So there are four groups of four soldiers, 16 soldiers. Now you might get the impression that this means that there were 16 men watching Peter all at once. But this is not the case.

The Roman policy was to change the guard every watch of the night. There were four watches of the night. And so there were four squads that would spell each other.

They'd watch for three hours. Then another group would come in. Then another group after three hours and so forth.

And we do read just a little later on here in verse 6 that Peter was chained between two guards. And there were apparently two guards watching the door. So that would be what a tetrad would do during his shift, that three-hour shifts.

And to get through the night, they needed four. So these four were assigned to him. Verse 5, Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for

him by the church.

I can imagine they just had one of the twelve apostles just summarily dispatched. And now another, who's also one of the three, Peter, James, and John, one of the three of the inner circle. Two out of three are now facing the same fate.

And the church would be very desperate and praying for Peter. Now, I wonder if the church didn't pray as much for James. I wonder if his arrest did not strike them as something that would end in death, and so they weren't as desperate.

Maybe they didn't have all-night prayer meetings for him. After all, Peter and John had been arrested twice before and had not been killed. They had been released.

So maybe the arrest of James just didn't strike the church as big a crisis until James was actually, perhaps to their amazement, killed. And now that Peter is in the same danger, they're going at it. They're praying night and day, as we shall see.

And the church is constantly making prayer to God for Peter. Because he's in prison, and not only in prison, but of course, almost certainly going to die if Herod carries out his plans. Verse 6, And so he did.

And when Peter had come to himself, he said, Now, this story resembles a little bit a story back in chapter 5 or 4, when the apostles were in prison in Jerusalem. And an angel came and delivered them and told them to go speak in the temple again. So we have Peter here experiencing a similar thing to what happened to him with the other apostles before.

These guys knew that being in prison was only something that would happen and continue only as long as God wanted it to happen. Because twice, at least, angels delivered them from prison. And if you could do it twice, you could do it any number of times.

The fact that God doesn't deliver us, we have to understand in the context that he could if he wanted to. You know, Paul spent two years in prison in Caesarea, and two more in prison in Rome at the end of the book of Acts. And no angels let him out.

It's interesting, isn't it, that James was put to death, but God could have sent an angel to deliver him too, but he didn't. There's no accounting for God's individualized will for different people. But one thing we see, whenever God heals somebody in Scripture, or whenever someone is delivered from death or delivered from prison, what God is showing is, I can handle this.

You know, this is not too big for me. I can fix this. But he doesn't always fix it.

Most people don't get healed. Most people in prison don't have angels come and deliver

them. But when they don't, it's not... What we're trying to say is, if God wanted to, he could send an angel.

And if he wanted to, he could heal. If he wanted to, he could do any of these. He's done it before.

He's shown what he can do. Therefore, it's in our mental kit. If God doesn't want me here, I won't be here.

The fact that I'm still here means he wants me here. If he didn't want me in this prison, he'd open the doors. He knows how.

If he didn't want me sick, he'd heal me. He knows how to do that too. And these instances where God does something like this, there's no predicting when he's going to do that when he's not for someone.

But mostly, he doesn't do it. Paul was in prisons oft, he said in 2 Corinthians. He's frequently in prison.

But we don't read of any time an angel came and let him out of prison. Peter gets this twice, interestingly. And it's also interesting that this was no doubt to deliver him from death.

And yet, it was God's will that Peter should be martyred later on. Why then and not now? Why one time and not another? It's because God is paying attention to every detail. He's got a purpose for your life.

He said the hairs of your head are numbered. Jesus actually said to the disciples, not a sparrow falls to the ground apart from the will of your father. And you're worth more than many sparrows.

What that means is that people do not die without it being God's will for them to die. Now, the angel has to wake him up. He's sleeping like a baby.

And so, the angel leads him out. They go past the first and second guard stations. Apparently, the guards are asleep or oblivious.

And the big iron gate to the whole prison compound itself opens on its own. They walk out in the street. The angel walks with him for a ways down the street and then disappears.

And Peter then says, in verse 12, and when he had considered this, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John, whose surname was Mark. For many were gathered together praying. And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a girl named Rhoda came to answer.

And when she recognized Peter's voice because of her gladness, she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter stood before the gate. But they said to her, you're beside yourself. You're crazy.

Yet she kept insisting that it was so. So they said, it's his angel. Now, Peter continued knocking.

And when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. But he motioned to them with his hand to keep silent. And he declared to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison.

And he said, go tell these things to James and to the brethren. And he departed and went to another place. Then as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers about what had become of Peter.

But when Herod had searched for him and not found him, he examined the guards and commanded that they should be put to death. And he went down from Judea, that is, Herod went from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there. Now, when Peter found himself released from prison, he went to a place where he knew he would find the Christians gathered.

And it was the house of Mary, the mother of John, whose name was Mark. Now, this man, John, whose name is Mark, is sometimes called John. Mostly in the book of Acts, he's called John.

He is referred to as Mark in some of the epistles. Paul refers to him when he's writing to Timothy. And also Peter refers to him.

John Mark, he refers to as my son. Mark is my son. In 1 Peter 5, verse 17, he refers to Mark as like a son to him.

Just like Paul did with Timothy. He doesn't mean he was his literal son, but like his protege, his son in the faith. The one who served him as his son serves the father.

That's what Paul said about Timothy. That's what Peter said about Mark. Now, at this point, Mark was not hanging with Peter, although Mark's mother had a house in Jerusalem where apparently it was large enough for the church to gather.

Many people think that may in fact be the house where the Last Supper had been held. John Mark's mother hosted the church in days after Pentecost. She may have done so in the days before as well.

We don't know. But one thing this points out is not everyone sold their houses. The Bible does say that in Jerusalem the Christians were selling houses and lands to help the poor, but some obviously kept their houses.

After all, they have to live somewhere. And the Christians have to meet somewhere. And this is one of the places they met.

Peter apparently knew he'd find Christians praying there. And so he's knocking on the door in the middle of the night, and a servant girl, Rhoda, hears him knocking. And she says, Who's there? He said, It's Peter.

And she's so excited she doesn't open the door. She runs back and says, Peter's at the door. And they say, It can't be him.

But he keeps knocking. Now they say to her, It's his angel, which is interesting. She must have kept insisting, No, I know it's Peter.

I looked through the hole and it looks like him or something. I don't know. She was insistent that it was him.

I don't know why she didn't just open the door, but she was so excited she wanted everyone to know that he was there. And they said, It's his angel, which is hard to explain. No one knows exactly how they meant this, his angel.

Some believe that it was the Jewish belief that everyone had a guardian angel who actually looked like you, that your guardian angel has the same appearance that you have. There's nothing in the Bible to support that, of course. But there was a Jewish tradition, at least in the 2nd century, that this was the case.

And maybe it was true in that time, too. Maybe they thought Peter's guardian angel had come. But why would his guardian angel come? Some people think it might refer to his own spirit, that he had died in prison, they thought, and his spirit was known.

His ghost was at the door. Or it could be something much less strange than either of those thoughts. It could simply be that the word angel means messenger.

The word angelos in the Greek is the ordinary word for messenger. In the Bible, it is used of angels. In fact, angel is the anglicized form of the word angelos.

But the Greek word was used of ordinary messengers, people. When John sent two messengers from prison to speak to Jesus, as we read in the Gospels, it says angeloi, angels. They weren't angels from heaven, they were just messengers.

And so a human messenger or a heavenly messenger would be called by the same word. When they said, it's his messenger, they could be simply saying, well, you misunderstood. If he said he has a message from Peter, maybe Peter has sent a messenger to us from prison.

He can't be out of prison himself, maybe he sent a message to us. Maybe it's his messenger. I don't know what they meant, but that last suggestion is the least strange of

the various ways it might be taken.

So when he came in, they were all excited, and he motions with his hand, be quiet, this is supposed to be a secret meeting, I'm in trouble here. I'm on the lam. I just infected a prison break here, and they'll be looking for me soon.

So basically what he tells them is how it happened, that he was released, and he says, and go tell James and the brethren. Now, at the beginning of this chapter, James, the brother of John, the son of Zebedee, was dead. So we know he's not talking about that James.

It does not say which James he means, but there's no question of which James he means. Because after the death of James, the son of Zebedee, another James, the brother of Jesus, kind of filled the role of James, the son of Zebedee. Whereas the three closest leaders among the apostles in the days of Jesus were Peter, James, and John, the brothers.

In Paul's day, we read in Galatians chapter 2 that Peter, James, and John were the pillars of the church, but that James is the one that's James, the brother of Jesus. The early church called him James the Just, because he was a very righteous man, very well respected, not only by the Christians, but by the Jews. And I wonder, do I have something about James the Just here? There is a description of James the Just in Eusebius.

Let me see here, I think it's in book 2. Is this book 2? This is book 1. Book 2. Yeah, here. Eusebius in book 2, chapter 1, talks about this James, not the one who was beheaded, but the one that Peter says, go tell James. It says, this James, therefore, whom the ancients, on account of the excellence of his virtue, surnamed the Just, was the first that received the episcopate of the church of Jerusalem.

But Clement, in his sixth book of his institutions, represents it thus, quote, Peter and James and John, after the ascension of our Savior, though they had been preferred by our Lord, did not contend for the honor, but they chose James the Just as bishop of Jerusalem. Now, this is what Eusebius quotes Clement as having said. And it says, Clement continues, the Lord imparted the gift of knowledge to James the Just, to John and Peter, after his resurrection.

These delivered it to the rest of the apostles and they to the 70 of whom Barnabas was one. There were, however, two Jameses, one called the Just, who was thrown from the wing of the temple. Talking later, the death of this James, which is recorded in Josephus, interestingly.

Josephus is not a Christian, but a Jewish historian. He actually records the death of James the Just, which the Bible does not. He was martyred.

And he was thrown from the wing of the temple and beaten to death with a fuller's club. And there's another James who was beheaded, says Clement, quoted by Eusebius. So both James's are mentioned in Acts chapter 12.

James, the original apostle, is beheaded. And James, the brother of Jesus, is mentioned also. Now, why did Peter say, go tell James? Peter, up to this point, has seemed to be the main spokesman for the church in Jerusalem.

He certainly was in the earliest chapters of Acts, and we don't read of any change having taken place. But I'm going to surmise that, even as Clement said, that the apostle James and John and Peter had all agreed to appoint James the Just to kind of oversee the church in Jerusalem, assuming that they themselves would have to be leaving. After all, Jesus told them to go into all the world and preach the gospel.

So in the early years of the church, the apostles themselves were overseeing the church in Jerusalem. But there had been, no doubt, an arrangement made previously that when they would have to leave, then James, the brother of Jesus, would assume leadership of the church in Jerusalem. We see that he did.

He did assume leadership of the church in Jerusalem at this point. And it's because Peter's going away. Peter has been available, and James and John also.

But now James is dead. Peter's going to parts unknown until Herod dies. And John, we don't know, maybe John was already traveling.

I'm not sure where John was. We don't have any record of that. But I think when Peter says, go tell James I'm leaving town, I think he's saying, this is your signal.

I told you, you're going to have to take over at some point. This is when you do it. I think tell James was Peter's way of saying, let James know it's time for him to step up and be in the position that we've appointed him to.

Now, it says Peter went to some other place. It's interesting that he doesn't mention where he went. There's an awful lot of geographical information about Paul's travels and even Peter's travels earlier, and specific towns are mentioned.

But here it just says he went to another place, which seems deliberately vague. By this point in time, Luke probably knew where it was that Peter had gone. I mean, this is Luke is writing this decades later, and so it no longer be a secret where Peter had been.

But he doesn't mention it. I suspect it's because Peter was a fugitive from justice. And whoever would have taken him in, maybe even at a later date, may have been in danger if Roman authorities would read that they had taken in a fugitive from Herod.

Even though Herod was dead by the time Acts was written, still Peter had fled from

prison from a Roman authority, and someone took him in. Somebody hosted him, and that would have been illegal. It's possible that whoever hosted him was still around and could have been prosecuted had their identity been revealed by Luke.

And so that would be the only thing I could think of why he would not mention the specific place Peter went. Probably to protect his collaborators, to protect those who aided and abetted him. Now, who did that? Well, it could have been anyone because there were churches all over the place by now.

He could have gone to almost any church. But we do know from Galatians chapter 2 that at some point Peter went to Antioch. This might have been when he went there.

And if you want to just take a look quickly at Galatians chapter 2, Paul talks about a time when Peter came to Antioch. He doesn't indicate when that was. But he mentions it immediately after mentioning his and Barnabas' trip to Jerusalem when they delivered the money, which is, of course, what we found at the end of chapter 11.

He talks about that visit he had with the apostles when he delivered the money. And then in Galatians 2.11 he says, Now, before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles. And when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those of the circumcision.

And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy. So Paul says there was a time when Peter came to Antioch. I actually had to oppose him.

Interesting. There is no record in the book of Acts of Peter ever going to Antioch, though he may have done so at any number of times that are not recorded in Acts. But we do read at this point he had he was on the lam and he had to flee from Judea and Antioch would be a good refuge.

After all, there was a new thriving church there. Barnabas and Paul were stationed there, though they may not have been there at the moment. And also it was in another country.

So Herod presumably would not be able to pursue him there. So although there's many ways that Peter could have gone and we cannot prove any one thing, we do know that Paul's testimony is that Peter at some point was in Antioch. And this might be the point.

It would be a sensible time for Peter to go. And it says that when Peter was in Antioch, he had no problem eating and drinking with the Gentile Christians there. Because, of course, he had already had his Cornelius episode and knew that that was OK.

But it says in Galatians 2, when people came from James, Peter withdrew from that table fellowship with the Gentiles. James, of course, is therefore acknowledged as the leader of

the church in Jerusalem. The people who came up were from Jerusalem.

He says they came from James because James was the leader in Jerusalem at this time, the very James that we were discussing a moment ago. So the time frame and the references seem to make sense. Now, of course, what happened there in Antioch, according to Paul, is that Peter knew that some of the Jerusalem Christians were a little squeamish about the Gentiles still being uncircumcised and being in the church.

And Jews did not like to have table fellowship with Gentiles. Now, the Jerusalem church had officially recognized that it was OK that Peter had had table fellowship with Cornelius, a Gentile. And therefore, there's a precedent that, you know, Peter knew it was not wrong.

But he knew that the church in Jerusalem had very little contact with Gentiles, and they were still probably not accustomed to eating with Gentiles. And all their lives, they thought of it as a disgusting thing. And so when the brethren from James or from Jerusalem came up to Antioch, Peter knew that they would be somewhat uncomfortable with his eating among the Gentiles.

So he withdrew from that fellowship. Now, the reason Paul didn't tolerate this is because they were living at a time where it was still being decided by most whether Gentiles were OK uncircumcised, whether an uncircumcised believing Gentile was on the same level with a circumcised believing Jew. This was something that had not been officially decided.

It would be in chapter 15 at the Jerusalem council would be an official decision, but that had not happened yet. And therefore, there were Christians who felt OK about it and Christians who didn't feel OK about it. And no official decision had been made.

Peter was OK with it, but he knew some of these people were not. And so he withdrew. But in doing so, he was communicating to the Gentiles that they're not OK.

They must be really confused. Why did Peter? He was OK with us until these guys came. Now he's acting like we're lepers, you know, he won't associate with us.

And this, Paul saw, was a bad precedent compromising the truth of the gospel. That the Gentiles were fully OK and that to withdraw from table fellowship was a divisive thing that was sinful. And he rebuked Peter for it.

He said even Barnabas succumbed to that intimidation briefly. Now Barnabas snapped out of it too and so did Peter. We know at the Jerusalem council, Peter spoke up in Paul's favor and even quoted or almost quoted some of the things that Paul rebuked him with in Galatians 2. So Peter was humble enough to recognize that he was doing the wrong thing when he was rebuked.

What's interesting is that a man like Paul, who was a relatively new apostle, would be so bold as to rebuke publicly Peter, the original Peter, you know, the original leader in the church in Jerusalem. But Paul was not a respecter of persons apparently and if someone did wrong, he'd call them out. Now that's probably, I'm thinking, probably where Peter went at this time when we're not told where he went.

That would be a good theory anyway since we know at some time he went to Antioch. This might be the time. Now we see that when the soldiers found Peter's cell empty the next morning, they couldn't make any account of what had happened.

Imagine you wake up, you've been chained to a prisoner when you fell asleep and suddenly your chains are still on your hands but he's gone. Someone opened his chains and then there's two guard points before you get to the exit of the prison. He passed both guard points and then the big gate swung open.

All the guards must have been asleep. Now Roman authorities, well frankly not just Roman, but sentries in any nation are not allowed to fall asleep. In most cases it is a capital offense for a sentry to fall asleep when he's on watch.

In Roman times it was no different. These guys were, you lose your prisoner, you lose your life. It says that Herod ordered them put to death.

I've always felt kind of sorry for those soldiers. They were just ordinary servicemen filling a shift and doing nothing particularly wrong except that they were guarding an innocent man. Soldiers and police don't always have the right to distinguish.

They follow orders. But these guys end up losing their lives because Peter gets away from them. Now before the chapter ends there's one more story about Herod.

It's the last story about Herod. It says, now Herod had been very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon. But they came to him with one accord and having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, they asked for peace because their country was supplied with food from the king's country.

Now this is not easy to understand. What it means is that Tyre and Sidon are two Phoenician or Lebanese cities to the north of Israel. They were free cities.

They were not under King Herod. But they did depend for food, for grain. They needed food from Herod's dominions.

And Herod worked the trade deals like Trump does with us in China. He worked the trade deals between his country and these guys and they needed his grain. They needed to keep the channels of commerce open.

But something had made him mad at them. Now Luke doesn't tell us anything about

what it was and we have no idea. They had somehow offended Herod and they were afraid that the supply lines of grain were going to be cut off.

So they decided to go and ingratiate themselves again to him so that they could stay on good commercial terms with him. Now Blastus was Herod's chamberlain or a high-ranking official in Herod's court. And apparently they approached him first and got him on their side so that they could speak to Herod.

Now we don't know exactly how all that turned out for them. But it says, And he was eaten by worms and died. But the word of God grew and multiplied.

And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they'd fulfilled their ministry. And they also took with them John, whose surname was Mark, who we first had heard about in verse 12. We now see he goes back to Antioch with them.

And eventually when Paul and Barnabas go on their first trip, they take him along. So Mark is in the picture here. He won't be for long, but he is at the moment.

Now this death of Herod is interesting because it has a secular confirmation in Josephus. Now Josephus was a Jewish historian contemporary with the apostles. He was younger than they were.

He was born in Jerusalem in 35 AD, I believe. So when he was born, Peter and James John were preaching in Jerusalem. And Josephus was a Jewish boy being raised there.

When the Jewish war broke out, Josephus participated in it as a Jewish general. But early in the conflict against the Romans, he was captured. And when he realized that the Jews had no hope of defeating the Romans, he turned to the Roman side to try to persuade the Jews to surrender.

And Titus, the Roman general at the gates of Jerusalem, used Josephus as an interpreter to speak to the Jews in their language. So the Jews today don't like Josephus because they think he was a turncoat. He works with the Romans, but he's more like Jeremiah.

Remember, Jeremiah knew that Jerusalem was going to be destroyed by the Babylonians. And so he urged the Jerusalemites to surrender. Jeremiah was put in prison for that.

The Jews hated Jeremiah for doing that because he urged their troops to surrender to Babylon because God told them, if you don't surrender, you're going to die. If you do surrender, you'll go away and you'll live. So Jeremiah was urging surrender because he saw the judgment of God on Jerusalem was imminent from the Babylonians.

Josephus was in a similar position. He recognized that God was going to judge Jerusalem through Rome. Josephus actually believed he was a prophet.

I don't believe he was a prophet, but he regarded himself to be a prophet. And he wasn't even a Christian. That's why I don't think he was a prophet.

But he was not successful in persuading his fellow people of Jerusalem to surrender to the Romans so they were wiped out for the most part. And when the captives were taken back to Rome, Josephus went with the Romans. And because he had collaborated with them in the latter part of the war, he was given a charge by the Roman authorities to write history for them.

And he wrote two major history works. One is called Antiquities of the Jews, which is the whole history of the Jewish race. And the other is called the Jewish War, which is about the period of war between Rome and the Jews.

This history, which is almost as old as the New Testament itself, has amazingly survived. Very few books have survived for 2,000 years, but some have been copied, the New Testament books among them and Josephus among them. And it's very helpful because we get from Josephus lots of helpful information about the war of the Jews and so forth.

But one thing that's interesting is, again, Josephus had never read the book of Acts. He was not a Christian. He didn't have access to the Christian documents.

But he also talks about the death of Herod. And Eusebius quotes Josephus. I have Josephus at home, and I could quote him myself, but I didn't want to carry two big books, so I just brought Eusebius to read when he quotes Josephus.

But in Eusebius, Book 2, Chapter 10, he says, But he, Herod, had completed the third year of his reign over all Judea, and he came to the city of Caesarea, which was formerly called the Tower of Strato. There he exhibited public shows in honor of Caesar, knowing it to be a kind of festival for his safety. At this festival was collected a great number of those who were the first in power and dignity throughout the province.

On the second day of the shows, being clad in a robe all wrought with silver, with a wonderful texture, he proceeded to the theater at the break of day. There the silver irradiated with the reflection of the earliest sunbeams, wonderfully glittered, reflecting a terrific and awful brilliancy upon the beholders. Presently the flatterers raised their shouts in different ways, such, however, as were not for his good, calling him a god and imploring his clemency in such language as this, We have feared thee thus far as a man, but henceforth we confess thee to be superior to the nature of mortals.

The king did not either chide them nor disclaim the impious flattery. After a little while raising himself, he saw an angel sitting above his head. Now, by the way, Josephus actually says he saw an owl above his head.

For some reason, Eusebius, quoting Josephus, misquotes him and says he saw an angel. Probably because Eusebius had read Acts and knew that Herod was struck by an angel.

But in Josephus, as he looked up, he saw an owl over his head.

Now there's an earlier story in Josephus about Herod that when he was at one time a prisoner, he and some other prisoners saw an owl on a wire over them, or a rope or something. And one of the prisoners, who said he was like a fortune teller or something, told Herod, the next time you see this owl, it'll be for your doom. And that had been some time earlier.

And now, according to Josephus, on this occasion, with his silver rope glistening and all the people saying, oh, you're a god, not a man, he looked up and he saw that owl again. And so he knew that was the omen, that he was going to die. This, he immediately perceived, was the cause of evils, as it had once been the cause of his successes.

And he felt a pain through his heart, and a sudden pang seized his bowels, which began to torment him with great violence. Turning then to his friends, he said, I, your God, am now commanded to depart this life, and fate will soon dispose your false assertions respecting me. He whom you have called an immortal is now compelled to die, but we must receive our destiny as it is determined by God.

That's what Herod said to his friends. And he died. It took him, I believe, five days to die.

He was in torment, and Luke says he was eaten with worms and died. Of course, Josephus doesn't give us a medical diagnosis of what it was, but he bent over and couldn't stand up, and he was in excruciating pain for several days, and then he died. What's interesting is that both Josephus and Acts, without consulting each other or knowing each other, both mentioned that this happened to him because people said he was a god and he didn't chide them.

Josephus says he didn't chide them for their impiety. Acts says he didn't rebuke them, or what's he say, immediately the angel of the Lord, because he did not give glory to God. So the death of Herod is described in very similar terms in Josephus as in Acts, and these are two totally independent accounts because neither Luke knew Josephus or Josephus Luke's work.

And so the king dies. Now we see then that the church's prayers not only released Peter from Herod, but eventually released the whole church from Herod by having Herod die. The fact that Herod's death was an act of God is seen in the fact that Luke says an angel of the Lord struck him.

So we see that the God of the New Testament is not really that different than the God of the Old Testament. And this is very important for us to know. We've got one God through both the Old and the New Testament.

Some people say, well, but God in the Old Testament seems so severe. I mean, Onan reaches out and touches the Ark of the Covenant, he's struck dead on the spot. Nadab

and Abihu offer strange fire in the tabernacle and suddenly fire from God comes out and consumes them.

This is a scary God. I wish God in the Old Testament was as nice as Jesus in the New Testament. Well, the God in the New Testament is no different.

Ananias and Sapphira are struck dead for lying to the Holy Spirit. Herod is struck down for his impiety. By the way, Jesus, who's called the Lamb in the book of Revelation, is pretty severe also.

And so the people cry out, you know, who will deliver us from the wrath of the Lamb? And, you know, so I mean, God is the same. It's just that in the Old Testament, we have a longer history. Actually, about 4000 years of history in the Old Testament and only about 40 or less years in the New.

So we have more cases in the Old Testament of God doing this kind of thing in 4000 years. Then we have record in the New Testament of it in 40 years. But actually, we see God still judging people in the New Testament in direct ways for their impiety.

Once again, not everyone gets judged like that. Not everyone who allows people to worship them gets struck down. But when God does something like that, he sets an example.

And basically, I think it's his way of saying this is what I could do. And this is what I think about this kind of behavior. And if I don't do it right now, you have that to look forward to.

You know, people who keep offending God in this way, he's already given them a sign of what he thinks about this and what he is. What he thinks the right judgment is for that. So we see then that Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch at the end.

And it's there that they first received their first commission to God on their missionary journey to the Gentile world in chapter 13. So we'll stop there and come back to chapter 13.