



Jerusalem: A Praying Church

Acts 12

1. Persecution (verses 1-5)

2. Prayer (verses 5-19)

3. Pride (verses 20-23)

4. Progress (verses 24-25)

For the past two weeks at Rock Valley Bible Church, we have been looking at the end of Acts, chapter 11, which describes the great church in Antioch. Many things were great about this church. The church was growing. Many people were believing and turning to the Lord (Acts 11:20).

A number of things made the church great. First of all, the church grew through the boldness of the people. In other words, they didn't have big evangelistic rallies, where the few gifted speakers come to woo the crowds, with their eloquence. Rather the average person in the church was, telling others of how sins can be forgiven through Jesus. And the Lord was at work, bringing many into the church. Further, the church in Antioch was great, because they had help. The church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to them. Barnabas, then, went to find the great apostle Paul, who trained the disciples of the church. Last week, we saw how those in the church in Antioch were generous, and gave to the church in Jerusalem, that would experience a famine.

My burden these past few weeks has been to look at this church at Antioch, and long that we, at Rock Valley Bible Church, might, in some way, experience of the greatness of this church. I long that we might be bold in our witness for Jesus, that we might be generous, that God's hand would be working in our midst.

Well, this morning, our focus will turn, away from the church in Antioch, and to the church in Jerusalem. In the next chapter, chapter 13, we will be back to Antioch. But this morning, we will look at the church in Jerusalem. We have seen of the church in Antioch that it was a great church. We have also seen that the church in Antioch was a giving church. The main point we will see from the church in Jerusalem, is that it is a praying church.

Thus, the title of my message this morning: "Jerusalem: A Praying Church." Further, my hope and prayer is for us to follow in their steps, that we, too, would be a praying church. Of all the things that we can learn as a church, this would be top of the list.

So, let's read our text, to give us all a good overview of what took place in Jerusalem.

Acts 12:1-25

About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. He killed James the brother of John with the sword, and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of Unleavened Bread. And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people. So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.

Now when Herod was about to bring him out, on that very night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries before the door were guarding the prison. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, "Get up quickly." And the chains fell off his hands. And the angel said to him, "Dress 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 followed him. 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 the second guard, they came to the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord, and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel left him. When Peter came to himself, he said, "Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting."

When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. And when he knocked at the door of the gateway, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer. Recognizing Peter's voice, in her joy she did not open the gate but ran in and reported that Peter was standing at the gate. They said to her, "You are out of your mind." But she kept insisting that it was so, and they kept saying, "It is his angel!" But Peter continued knocking, and when they opened, they saw him and were amazed. But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, "Tell these things to James and to the brothers." Then he departed and went to another place.

Now when day came, there was no little disturbance among the soldiers over what had become of Peter. And after Herod searched for him and did not find him, he examined the sentries and ordered that they should be put to death. Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and spent time there.

Now Herod was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon, and they came to him with one accord, and having persuaded Blastus, the king's chamberlain, they asked for peace, because their country depended on the king's country for food. On an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and delivered an oration to them. And the people were shouting, "The voice of a god, and not of a man!" Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down, because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last.

But the word of God increased and multiplied. And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had completed their service, bringing with them John, whose other name was Mark.

In the heart of these 25 verses, is a church that is gathered together for a prayer meeting, passionately praying to the Lord. The reason for the prayer meeting comes in the first 5 verses, which I am simply calling, ...

1. Persecution (verses 1-5)

We read in verse 1, ...

Acts 12:1
About that time ...

The time referred to here is about that time when Paul and Barnabas were bringing a financial gift to help those in Jerusalem, which you can read about in the last verse of chapter 11, "And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul" (Acts 11:30).

Again, verse 1, ...

Acts 12:1
About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church.

This is persecution. In this case, it is the government, king Herod, using his power, with evil intent, upon innocent people, those who had done no wrong.

This is nothing new for God's people. It began with the first family, when Cain despised his brother Abel. Why did Cain despise Abel? Because Abel offered an acceptable sacrifice before the Lord, and so Cain killed his brother Abel. What began with the first family continued right on down throughout the entire Old Testament. The righteous have always been hated by the wicked. Whether it was Joseph, or Jeremiah, or Daniel they were persecuted for their trust in God.

The same is true for the New Testament. In fact, in the very first pages of the New Testament, we see persecution taking place. Do you remember when the wise men came from the east to worship "he who has been born king of the Jews"? (Matt. 2:2). They came to Jerusalem, but were directed to Bethlehem. And when Herod, the king, found out about the baby, he ordered all of the baby boys under 2 years of age killed in Bethlehem. This was an incredible act of violence against the Jewish people, though they had done nothing wrong.

And now, in Acts 12, we see Herod's grandson, Herod Agrippa, doing the same, turning a violent hand against the church, though they had done nothing wrong. [\[1\]](#) Verse 2 describes his evil.

Acts 12:2
He killed James the brother of John with the sword,

Now, this is big! This is the first apostolic martyr of the church. You might say, "Hey, wait a minute, what about Stephen? In Acts, chapter 7?" Stephen was the first Christian martyr. But he wasn't an apostle. James was an apostle.

James was one of the twelve disciples. In fact, James was one of the three closest disciples. Jesus had his twelve disciples. But then he had his three in the inner circle. James, and his brother John, and Peter were the closest disciples of Jesus. These three alone went with him on the Mount of Transfiguration (Mark 9:2-3). These three alone went with him to witness the daughter of Jairus being raised from the dead (Luke 8:29-56). These three alone were with him when he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. As someone said, "These three [men] witnessed Jesus' greatest moments of glory and his darkest trials. They were his closest friends." [\[2\]](#)

One of these three men, a decade into the life of the church, was killed with the sword, which probably means that he was beheaded. This should have come as no surprise to them, or the other disciples. I say this because of the prophesy of Jesus. Do you remember the time when they approached Jesus, asking him for a favor? Jesus said, "What do you want me to do for you?" (Mark 10:36). They said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory" (Mark 10:37). They asked this because the status of James and John was obvious. They were the "inner circle." It only made sense that they would be given prominent places in the kingdom of Jesus.

But Jesus replied, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" And they said to him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized, but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared." (Mark 10:38-40). The "baptism" here is not water baptism, but the "baptism" of persecution. For James, his baptism meant losing his head.

How exactly Herod worked this through the legal system, I'm not quite sure. For Jesus, it took a hasty trial in the night for him to be condemned to death. But with the prominence of the disciples of Jesus, perhaps it was easier, simply to execute one of their leaders, in attempts to ward off the movement. (I don't know). But, I do know that he received some political points for killing James. I know this, because this is what verse 3 says, ...

Acts 12:3

and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of Unleavened Bread.

Governmental leaders are always taking polls to see what the people want. When the people are happy, it's easier to keep in power. The Jews were happy when James was killed, because they hated the Christians. The Jews viewed the Christians as heretics, who must be eliminated. This is seen in what Paul was doing before his conversion. He was ravaging the church, entering house after house, looking for heretics, looking for followers of Jesus. And as he found them, he dragged them off to prison, men and women alike (Acts 8:3). Paul was trying to snuff out the church. This is what the Jews wanted. They wanted the believers in Jesus to be eliminated. This is why killing James pleased the Jews.

With James down, another disciple from the inner circle was next: Peter. So, Herod arrested him and planned to put him to death as well. However, "this was during the days of Unleavened Bread" (verse 3). That is, it was during the days of a Jewish Holiday and festival. It was a time when Jews from far away would travel to Jerusalem to remember the Passover. It was a time of joy for the people. It was not the time for the king to be executing prisoners. That time would come after the feast, after the people returned home. when things would return to normal.

So, Peter awaited his fate in prison. This is what verse 4 describes.

Acts 12:4

And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people.

The church responded the only way they could, in prayer.

Acts 12:5

So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.

This leads us to our second point, We saw "Persecution" in the first five verses. And now, we see ...

2. Prayer (verses 5-19)

... in the next fifteen verses. Notice, first off, how this prayer is described in verse 5. It is "earnest prayer."

"Earnest prayer" is the sort of prayer that you pray, not because you are told to pray, but because you can do no other. This is the sort of prayer that arises out of desperation, when you see that you are powerless with nowhere else to turn. You turn to prayer. You turn to earnest prayer. This is like the prayer of Jesus when he was in the garden, awaiting his death. He was in such anguish of heart that he could do nothing but pray. He pleaded with his father, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done" (Luke 22:42). We read in Hebrews 5:7 that this prayer was "with loud cries and tears."

Luke described his prayer, "Being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22:44). This is the same word used to describe the prayer of the church for Peter, "earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church" (verse 5).

Can you hear the prayers? This is not a quiet, dispassionate prayer, "Oh, Lord, we come to you, most gracious God. who hears and answers prayer. We are saddened this day at the death of James, our beloved friend and co-worker in the gospel. And now, we are concerned about Peter. You know his situation. He is awaiting his death. But we pray for your mercy to him." That's not "earnest prayer."

Earnest prayer is loud and passionate with short, brief, to the point sentences. "Oh God, we are in trouble! We need your help! Herod has killed James. Peter is next! These are the leaders of your church! These are faithful followers of you! They don't deserve this! We know that following you is costly. We know that Jesus told us to 'take up our cross.' But that doesn't mean that we need to like it! We pray your protection upon us, who believe in the name of your son, Jesus, who died for us. We trust you. But we don't know what will become of your church without its leaders. God, be gracious to Peter! Deliver him from prison. Move the heart of Herod that he might grant Peter's release. Oh, God, grant this miracle! We need you now! We need you to act! Oh, God show mercy to us. Help us! Help us! Help us!"

That's earnest prayer. That's how the early church was praying. Have you ever heard people pray like that? The closest that I have witnessed to this has been during my missionary travels to Nepal and India. I have heard pastors pray "earnestly." I have heard churches pray "earnestly." They pray because they are desperate. They are poor and needy and have nowhere else to turn, but to the Lord. And so, they pray to him with passion and feeling and urgency. Perhaps our prayers are not so earnest, because we are not in distress like those in poorer nations, like those in the early church.

Well, the story continues in verse 6. The Feast of Unleavened Bread was over. It was time for Peter to be put to death. Verse 6 describes Peter's circumstances in prison.

Acts 12:6

Now when Herod was about to bring him out, on that very night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries before the door were guarding the prison.

The picture we get is of a prison cell, that is very secure. Peter is bound with chains, his hands and feet. There is a soldier on his right. There is a soldier on his left. There are guards in front of the door. That's at least four soldiers guarding Peter. Peter was hardly a threat. He was not violent. Nor was he a flight risk. Instead, we read that "Peter was sleeping."

That is amazing. The church outside the prison is praying, they can't sleep. Peter, inside the prison, is sleeping, he is content in the Lord. What a great picture of how God can remove the anxiety of those who wait for him. "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7). If Peter can sleep in prison, the night before he was to be delivered over to death, so can you sleep through the anxious troubles of your life.

Anyway, we read in verse 7 how Peter's sleep was interrupted.

Acts 12:7

And behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, "Get up quickly." And the chains fell off his hands.

Being awakened from slumber is not a pleasant experience. Even the Proverbs points out this fact in Proverbs 27:14, "Whoever blesses his neighbor with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, will be counted as cursing." This Proverb is describing the experience we all have had at one point or another in our lives, when you are awakened by an overly-zealous person, who clicks on the light and begins singing, "Arise and shine and give God the glory!" Such an experience is never pleasant.

In Peter's case, an angel appeared to him, a light shined on him, but that wasn't enough to awaken him. Rather it took the nudge of the angel on his side to awaken him. I'm sure that he was groggy, as all of us are the moment we awaken. But at that moment, the chains fell from his hands and feet. He was able to follow the counsel of the angel and get up. The jailbreak continues in verse 8.

Acts 12:8-9

And the angel said to him, "Dress 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 followed him. He did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision.

Peter had experience visions before. Remember in Acts 10, when Peter was staying in Joppa. He was on the roof at the sixth hour (Acts 10:9). He was praying (Acts 10:9). And he fell into a trance and saw this vision of "something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. And there came a voice to him: 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat'" (Acts 10:11-13). This is what he thought was happening. He thought that he was dreaming. But it was not dream. He was being set free!

Acts 12:10

When they had passed the first and the second guard, they came to the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord, and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel left him.

We see this happen all the time. We enter a grocery store (or some public place), and as we approach, the motion detectors sense us, and the doors open. To us, this is no big deal. But to Peter, it was. He had never seen this. In fact, it was miraculous! There were no motion detectors. It was the power of God. And it would do us well to remember this story every time we walk through an automatic door, remembering that we serve a miraculous God! who can open prison doors. who can set the captives free!^[3] We would do well to walk through the automatic doors singing to ourselves the marvelous words of Charles Wesley.

Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quick'ning ray,
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free;
I rose, went forth and followed Thee.

As we sing this song (to ourselves if in a public place), it will help us to realize the salvation that we have experienced in Christ Jesus. Just as the physical door opened for Peter, so the spiritual door has opened for all of us who believe. We are no longer bound in our sin, but are set free in Christ through our faith. It is a marvelous reality that we need to remember often.

Back to Peter. He was set free indeed! This is what he realizes in verse 11.

Acts 12:11

When Peter came to himself, he said, "Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting."

So, Peter does what every escaped prisoner does. He goes to his friends and family.

Acts 12:12

When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying.

This house may well be the very same "upper room" where the early church prayed together after the ascension of Jesus. Do you remember that in Acts, chapter 1? All of the disciples were there. There were some women there as well. Mary, the mother of Jesus was there. The brothers of Jesus was there. And we read in Acts 1:14, "All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer." Again, we get a glimpse into the prayer life of the early church. They were all together. They were all "devoted to prayer." We would do well, as a church, to be devoted to the same thing. All together! All devoted to prayer.

So again, I invite you to our prayer meeting at 9am on Sunday morning. We don't meet in the "upper room." We meet in the "lower room." We meet in the basement for prayer. Our God can do great things. He can set prisoners free! So, let's gather together and pray to the Lord, and see him do wonderful things through our prayers. Jerusalem was a praying church! May we, at Rock Valley Bible Church, be a praying church as well.

Anyway, Peter comes to the prayer meeting, and knocks at the door, because the place was locked.

Acts 12:13-15

And when he knocked at the door of the gateway, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer. Recognizing Peter's voice, in her joy she did not open the gate but ran in and reported that Peter was standing at the gate. They said to her, "You are out of your mind." But she kept insisting that it was so, and they kept saying, "It is his angel!"

This is an ironic twist that shows us how we are like the early church. Here, the church was praying for Peter! And God answers their prayer! He releases Peter from prison in a miraculous way. And when Peter, himself, is standing at the door! the church refuses to believe it. "It's only his angel." Still! If an angel is at the door, don't you think that you should go and look into the situation! You don't see an angel every day. I think that it shows how unbelieving the church was. and how unbelieving we can be as well. This is so encouraging to me. Yes, the early church was devoted to prayer! Yes, the early church saw great things take place through their prayers. But the early church still had struggles with their faith, just like us.

Or, perhaps, the church hadn't been praying for Peter's release. Perhaps the church had been praying for Peter's faithfulness unto death. that he would remain true to the Lord. that he would not deny the Lord as he had done before. but that he would be "faithful unto death" that he might receive the "crown of life" (Revelation 2:10). Perhaps, they believed that the appearance of Peter's angel was merely a confirmation that Peter had died. It was his spirit that appeared to them.

But that wasn't the case! It was Peter at the door.

Acts 12:16

But Peter continued knocking, and when they opened, they saw him and were amazed. But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, "Tell these things to James and to the brothers." Then he departed and went to another place.

Can't you just see the situation! Peter is an escaped convict! He knows that the soldiers will be out looking for him soon. So, he quickly tells the story of how the angel woke him up. how his chains fell off. how he passed by the guards unnoticed. how the doors to the prison opened up. how he was told to "tell these things to James and to the brothers" (verse 17).

Now, obviously, this is not the James of verse 2. He was killed by Herod. This is James, the half-brother of Jesus. Who didn't believe that Jesus was the messiah until after Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to him alive and well (John 7:5; 1 Cor. 15:7). The significance of Peter telling James is that James would now take up a leadership role in the church. Peter was now a fugitive. and had to leave. Acts 12:17 he departed and went to another place. Soon, we find Peter fleeing to Caesarea, away from Jerusalem (verse 19). In his absence, James will become a prominent leader in Jerusalem. When we get to Acts 15, we will see him taking a prominent role, even being the voice that settles the matter at the Jerusalem counsel.

Anyway, in verse 18, we see the fallout.

Acts 12:18

Now when day came, there was no little disturbance among the soldiers over what had become of Peter. And after Herod searched for him and did not find him, he examined the sentries and ordered that they should be put to death. Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and spent time there.

This is the accountability of the Roman criminal system. To fail in your guard duties brings your death. We will see this in Acts 16, when there was an earthquake and the prison was not secure, the jailor was ready to kill himself, as he assumed the prisoners had escaped. It took Paul who shouted from the prison, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here" (Acts 16:28). This is what makes the resurrection of Jesus so remarkable. The soldiers guarding the tomb were not held accountable for their failure to guard the body of Jesus. Instead, the soldiers were bribed, so as not to tell all that happened. And the religious leaders would cover their tracks before the governor (Matt. 28:14).

So, here the soldiers who were given charge to guard Peter, lost their lives, as they couldn't find Peter, who escaped to Caesarea. Let's move on to our next point this morning.

3. Pride (verses 20-23)

Acts 12:20

Now Herod was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon, and they came to him with one accord, and having persuaded Blastus, the king's chamberlain, they asked for peace, because their country depended on the king's country for food.

Here we see politics at work. It's difficult for us to understand exactly what was going on here. One commentator said that "The situation Luke describes in these verses is not entirely clear."^[4] For some reason, precisely unknown to us, Herod was angry with Tyre and Sidon, north of Jerusalem, along the coast of the Mediterranean sea. These were important seaport cities. So, I would suspect that Herod's anger has something to do with lack of taxes or income from the region. But they wanted peace with Herod, because he supplied them with food. So, on a political visit, we see some flattery taking place, in an effort to make peace.

Acts 12:21-22

On an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and delivered an oration to them. And the people were shouting, "The voice of a god, and not of a man!"

That's exactly what Herod wanted. He was a narcissistic king, who wanted nothing more than to have his ego stroked. And they stroked his ego, calling him God. In Herod's pride, he loved the attention! But what may have gone well with Herod's ego didn't go so well with God.

Acts 12:23

Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down, because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last.

As you read this, you get the impression that he died instantly. But Josephus, the Jewish historian tells us a bit more of the details about this event, which is a bit more detailed. Josephus writes, ...

The king did neither rebuke them, nor reject their impious flattery. ... [he] fell into the deepest sorrow. A severe pain also arose in his belly, and began in a most violent manner. ... His pain was become violent. Accordingly he was carried into the palace, and the rumor went abroad every where, that he would certainly die in a little time. ... And when he had been quite worn out by the pain in his belly for five days, he departed this life, being in the fifty-fourth year of his age, and in the seventh year of his reign.^[5]

There is nothing inconsistent with the account of Josephus and the account found in Acts. Herod certainly died of worms, but not instantly upon the stage. Rather, it was after five days of intense suffering. We can surmise that he died of intestinal roundworms (or something of the sort).

Josephus also tells us when this took place. It took place at the festival held in honor of Emperor Claudius (A.D. 44), sometime in August. That means that it was some 4 or 5 months after the death of James, who was put to death during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which comes every March or April.

Now the question that begs to be asked here is this: Why is this here? Why is this passage included in Luke's account of what took place? In other words, you can ask yourself about what we would miss if this passage were missing. Every passage in the Bible is there for a reason. What if it weren't there?

I believe that we would miss the whole idea of vengeance. God says, "Vengeance is mine! I will repay" (Romans 12:19). This passage tells us that those who persecute the church will not get away with it. God will take care of them. So, we don't need to worry much about our enemies. God will take care of them for us.

This is why the church succeeds with deeds of love and mercy, not with swords, not with spears, not with guns, not with military might, not with coalitions, not with elections. We succeed by prayer. We succeed by the Lord. We fight with prayer. God fights with worms!

We could pull many example. Let's just try one from my Bible reading this week: Psalm 52. In this Psalm we see David speaking against Doeg the Edomite, who betrayed him and his men to king Saul. David said, ...

Psalm 52:3-5

You love evil more than good,
and lying more than speaking what is right. Selah
You love all words that devour,
O deceitful tongue.
But God will break you down forever;
he will snatch and tear you from your tent;
he will uproot you from the land of the living. Selah

This is exactly what took place here with king Herod and the worms. He was uprooted from the land of the living. The lesson for us is this. God will pour out his vengeance upon our enemies, who are also God's enemies.

We have one final point:

4. Progress (verses 24-25)

Acts 12:24

But the word of God increased and multiplied.

This is one of those progress reports in the book of Acts that I have spoken to you about. The other progress reports in Acts come in Acts 2:47; 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:30-31. In these verses you will read things like, "The Lord added to their number day by day those who were saved" (Acts 2:47). Or, "The word of God continued to increase" (Acts 6:7). Or, "The churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily" (Acts 16:5). Throughout the book of Acts, there are constant reminders of the incredible growth of the church and progress of the gospel.

So, know that persecution will never stop God's word. Though a host encamp against us, God's word will prevail. We will see this especially beginning in chapter 13, which we will look at next week.

Acts 12:25

And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had completed their service, bringing with them John, whose other name was Mark.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on September 19, 2021 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org.

[1] To be clear, the Herod who was king in Matthew 2 is known as "Herod the Great." The Herod who was king in Acts 11 is known as "Herod Agrippa." He is Herod the Great's grandson.

[2] See <https://www.gotquestions.org/Jesus-inner-circle.html>.

[3] I am indebted to R. C. Sproul for recommending such a practice in a sermon he preached to his church on this passage.

[4] Richard N. Longenecker, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Volume 9 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 412.

[5] Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 19.8.2. You can find an electronic copy here: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2848/2848-h/2848-h.htm>.

[6] See here: <http://sermons.rvbc.cc/sermons/2021-010>.