

# Jesus Builds – the book of Acts

## Lesson Fifteen | Acts 11:27-12:24

### Background

The book of Acts was written by the physician, Luke, as a continuation of his Gospel. Jesus said he would build his church and Acts is the earliest history we have about that. It begins with the Ascension on Mount Olivet and then tracks the development of the early church with a particular focus on Peter in the early chapters and Paul in the later chapters, taking us to the early AD 60s.

### Context

After Stephen's death, many Christians left Jerusalem but continued primarily preaching to Jews. Saul's powerful conversion brought momentary peace to the churches, and then Peter's dream and the conversion of Cornelius set the stage for deliberate evangelism of Gentiles. This was especially evident in the church at Antioch, where Saul ministered for one year (11:26). The hatred of non-believing Jews toward Christians in Acts 12 sets up Paul's missionary journeys to more receptive Gentiles. Other than one reference in Acts 15:7 to Peter, Acts 12 concludes Luke's focus on Peter's ministry.

### *Enmity Toward Jewish Christians In Judea*

1. **Loving Jesus, Loving People (11:27-30):** Acts 11 closes with a prophetic message to the largely Gentile church at Antioch that a severe famine would spread over the Roman Empire during the reign of Emperor Claudius (A.D. 41-54). The mostly Gentile Christians at Antioch took a collection for the mostly Jewish Christians in Judea.
2. **GREAT CONTRAST** — In contrast to the Gentiles at Antioch who showed love for the Jewish believers in Judea, and thus love for Jesus, the non-believing Jews in Judea show nothing but enmity toward the Jewish believers in Judea, and thus enmity toward Jesus.
3. **Apostle James Martyred (12:1-2).** The first execution of an apostle was ordered by Herod Agrippa I, grandson of Herod the Great that tried to murder Jesus in Bethlehem. He did this to gain political favor with non-believing Jews.
4. **Peter Arrested (12:3-4):** Agrippa I arrested Peter and put him under heavy guard, likely aware of Peter's earlier jailbreak (5:19-24). His intent was to put Peter on trial after the Passover (combined 8 days long feast) and execute him.
5. **GREAT ESCAPE (12:5-11):** God sent an angel to break Peter out of jail and it was nothing less than supernatural.
  - Does God still do things like this today?
  - How might this affect how we pray?
6. **Who is at the door? (12:12-17)** Even the Christians praying for Peter were surprised at how quickly he escaped. This passage introduces John Mark who wrote what we call the Gospel of Mark. He will end up traveling with Saul.
7. **Herod Enraged (12:18-19):** Herod executed the soldiers that "allowed" Peter to escape then traveled to Caesarea.
8. **God Executes Herod A.D. 44 (12:20-23):** Tyre and Sidon depended on Galilee (within Herod's domain) for grain and sought to make peace with him over some dispute. The people hailed Herod as a god, which Herod enjoyed momentarily until the true God executed him with a flesh-eating plague.
9. **God's Word Spread (12:24):** Herod's attempts to stifle Christianity failed and Luke ends this section with a summary statement that God's Word spread.