



Acts Chapter 12

Theme of Acts: The Holy Spirit and the Birth of the Church

Personal Reflection

Complete this section in one sitting or little by little during the week. Begin with prayer, inviting the Holy Spirit into your time. Spending time in the Bible, studying the original intent, meaning and cultural context helps you to understand how it applies to you now.

Further Study: with your small group or on your own

Complete with your small group if you are in one; or complete on your own, spending time with God.

Song for the week: Fresh Wind: Hillsong

Song links: <https://youtu.be/7LRqPaBCRVs?si=EhPvF4Z6rATS5YHI>

Read Acts 12 Click on any Bible verse in the study to read it or use your own Bible.

Personal Reflection

Among the first disciples called by Jesus were the brothers James and John, sons of Zebedee. Jesus called them the Sons of Thunder.

Along with Peter, they were with Jesus for His transfiguration (when Jesus' appearance changed into a glorified appearance), were witness to Jesus raising Jairus's daughter from the dead and were with Jesus when He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. *Optional, read Mark 3:16-19, Matthew 17:1, Mark 9:2-10, Luke 8:49-56, Matthew 26:36-38*

James was the first apostle to be killed and the only one whose death is recorded in the Bible. His brother John was the last apostle to die (from old age).

Why might Luke have taken time to record the death of James?

Many leaders today focus on reaching many. Jesus gave special attention to three (Peter, James and John) and trained 12 (the disciples). He focused intentionally on building relationships.

Using Jesus' model, what does this teach us about how we should invest in our relationships?

Jesus gave the Great Commission to GO and tell the gospel. He modeled that in His teaching the multitudes. Who are you currently sharing the gospel with or teaching about Jesus?

King Herod arrested Peter during Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. "The Passover commemorated the deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage and slavery while the Feast of Unleavened Bread was a memorial of the haste in which the Israelites left Egypt (bibleask.com)."

Leaven, like sin, spreads. The price for sin is death. Jesus's first full day in the grave fell on the first day of Unleavened Bread. He was unleavened / without sin, paying the price for our sin. When we

accept Him as our Lord and Savior, death passes over us and we are made in right relationship with God. *Optional, read Galatians 5:9, Romans 6:23, 2 Corinthians 5:21*

Jesus was innocently charged, imprisoned (held captive by death) and broke free, rising from the dead. God also broke Peter free - not to save us from our sin, but to preserve the telling of the gospel, the good news of Jesus as our Messiah, Savior and Lord..

After the angel rescued Peter, the Bible says he came to himself. "As with his vision, Peter does not immediately understand what is happening. After his miraculous release, he immediately seeks Christian community, a frequent pattern in pointing to the necessity of Christian Fellowship (Life with God Bible)."

Who do you seek out when you need friendship or community? What are you doing to grow those relationships?

Peter went to Mary's house to find Christian community. Mary was the mother of John, also called Mark. John was a common Hebrew name while Mark was a common Roman name. The use of both a Hebrew and Roman name was not unusual, much like Saul (Hebrew) also known as Paul (Roman).

Being at Mary's home, "many biblical scholars believe that it was the start of John Mark and Peter's lasting relationship. For it is noted that he wrote the Gospel of Mark from Peter's viewpoint." While Luke wrote his gospel - and the book of Acts - after being a disciple of Paul.

Given that Mary's home was a gathering place and she had a servant named Rhoda, she was most likely wealthier than average. Greek comedies often made fun of slave women. Luke contrasts that by naming Rhoda who stayed firm in knowing who Peter was.

God created both men and women. Neither is better than the other. However, in Greco-Roman times men were seen as superior to women. What are some things that Luke wrote which emphasize Jesus' outlook on women?

Luke compared the two ways our lives can proceed - life with God or death without God.

Saul had been persecuting Christians before his conversion. His belief in Jesus led to not just his own life change, but to many others who believed from his teaching - including our possible life change as we read the letters he wrote to the churches. *Optional, read Acts 9:1-2, Acts 9:17-20*

King Herod was also persecuting Christians. When he did not attribute God's work to God, he was eventually killed by an angel of God.

If you have accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior, you have life with God. What has changed in your life as a result of your belief?

Write down a few ways that your life change with Jesus is affecting others.

If you have not chosen Jesus as your God, what questions do you have? What is keeping you from belief? Take time to write these things down. Consider either asking God to reveal the answers to you or asking a Christian friend or our pastors.

An angel of the Lord, whether or not the same one, appears twice in Acts 12. “To the one, his touch brings freedom and the dropping off of his chains; to the other it brings gnawing agonies and a horrible death. The trite proverb, ‘One man’s meat is another man’s poison,’ is true ... That Gospel may either be to us the means of freeing us from our chains, and leading us out of our prison-house into sunshine and security, or be the fatal occasion of condemnation and death. Which it shall be depends on ourselves (MacLaren’s Expositions).”

The Gospel is the good news. The good news is Jesus. How has the good news of Jesus brought you freedom?

The Church was praying. The believers’ exact prayers are not known, but it would not be a leap to think they may have been praying for their persecution to end. If so, God answered that in two different ways.

After Saul’s conversion, the Church enjoyed peace and grew. After King Herod’s death, the gospel continued to spread. Two persecutors were silenced, one by choosing Jesus and one by remaining in opposition to the gospel. *Optional, read Acts 9:27-31, Acts 12:23-24*

Read 1 John 5:14-15. Paraphrase what it says.

How does what God did with Saul and King Herod both point to His hearing what the Church may have been praying?

When God answers us, it is out of His love for us and to give Himself glory. How were these answers proof of His love for the believers and how did they glorify Him?

Joseph was called Barnabas (“son of encouragement”) by the apostles. Barnabas was a good man, filled with the Holy Spirit and faith. He was the one who told the apostles about Saul’s conversion. *Optional, read Acts 4:36, Acts 9:27-31, Acts 11:22-24*

Barnabas and Saul traveled together and took John Mark, who was Barnabas’ cousin, with them as they continued to spread the gospel. *Optional, read Colossians 4:10*

In only 7 generations, Roman rule went from persecuting believers in Jesus to a changed perspective. In 325 Emperor Constantine initiated the council in Nicaea to bring peace between religions. After many debates, Constantine agreed to a creed which stated that God and Jesus are one. Then in 380, the Eastern Roman Emperor Theodosius I made Christianity the official religion and punished the practicing of pagan rituals. “It bound the Judeo-Christian roots of the European continent to Greco-Roman culture (In Focus).”

Putting it into practice:

Read 1 John 5:14-15 again.

What do you want to bring to God in prayer?

Consider writing out your prayer to God - or starting a prayer journal with your requests dated and space next to the prayers for when and how God has answered you.

Further Study - with your small group or on your own

Relationships

James, John and Peter had a unique relationship with Jesus that was close.

As a small group meeting together regularly, you are creating a unique relationship within our church. It's not to the exclusion of others, but purposefully focusing on each other.

What are some ways being in a small group is helping you grow, serve and love?

Prayer

While Peter was in prison, the church was praying for him. Community prayer was consistent and normal for the early believers. It was one of their high priorities. *Optional, read Acts 2:42, Acts 4:31, Acts 6:3-4*

"When we pray with others, we surrender our "me"-centered thoughts and instead focus on the requests we're bringing to the throne together. We leave behind our individual agendas in the light of God's will. As a result, we're drawn to each other. We have the ability to be vulnerable, to open ourselves to accountability, and to grow in grace and mercy toward each other (Encompass World Partners)."

While you are together, pray for each other, your group and how God may be wanting to use you. Pray for our church, our community and our country. This is not a time to provide fixes or answers for each other, nor is it a time to voice a side you may align with. Instead it is a time to bring your requests to God together, inviting in His will.

What did you notice when praying together? How did it affect you as a group and as individuals?

Writers of the New Testament

While not all of the writers of the New Testament have been introduced in Acts, many have been.

John Mark wrote the gospel of Mark between 55-70 AD. His is the earliest gospel written.

Luke wrote the gospel of Luke between AD 80-110. He also wrote the book of Acts.

John the son of Zebudee, wrote the gospel of John between 90-100 AD. He also wrote 1,2 and 3 John and Revelation.

Saul/Paul wrote 13 books in the New Testament.

As you are getting to know the writers of the New Testament, how might you introduce them to a friend of yours? What might you say about each man?

Follow Up

Is there anything from this week's personal reflection time which you would like to discuss more with your small group?